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ABSTRACT

This guide highlights issues involved in increasing participation in welfare-to-work programs and offers advice and best practices for achieving higher participation levels. Part 1, "Introduction," has three sections that discuss the importance of participation, summarize major points, and introduce the guide. The seven sections of Part 2, "Setting the Stage," discuss the following: calculating welfare-to-work program participation; summarizing participation requirements of the 1996 welfare law; presenting barriers to high participation rates; reviewing welfare reform approaches and their effects on participation; examining the relationship between participation and program effectiveness and between sanctioning and participation; and discussing how increasing participation affects program costs. Part 3, "Getting People in the Door," discusses typical orientation attendance rates and reasons people do not attend and then describes strategies to improve program outreach, as well as intake and follow-up. Five sections in Part 4, "Keeping People In," discuss the effect on participation of case management practices and offer guidance on monitoring participation and enforcing the participation mandate, motivating participants, reducing periods of inactivity, and meeting support service needs. Part 5, "Reaching Deeper into the Caseload," has three sections that describe the hard-to-serve and how to identify them, strategies for increasing participation among them, and program approaches to elicit participation from them. Provisions of the 1996 federal welfare law are appended. Contains 55 references. (YLB)

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ReWORKing Welfare

Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A How-to Guide

Promoting Participation

How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities

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A How-to Guide

Promoting Participation

How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities

Gayle Hamilton
Susan Scrivener

September 1999

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Preface

One of the major elements of welfare reform nationwide is a focus on increasing the number of people who participate in welfare-to-work programs. When the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was signed into law in August 1996, many experts questioned whether states would be able to meet the high participation rates the law required. Under the previous JOBS program, states typically worked with only a small fraction of those receiving welfare.

Since then, the federal rates have become less of an issue because caseload declines have meant that almost all states need to meet much lower rates. But the issue of participation has remained prominent for other reasons. First, requiring participation in employment-focused activities is central to changing the "culture" of welfare. Second, time limits increase the importance of helping *all* welfare recipients find jobs before they reach the end of assistance. Third, newly available funding under grants from the U.S. Department of Labor means that more participants can be served — as long as they are identified and enrolled. Many programs are finding that these are significant challenges. Finally, the federal rates may become more difficult to meet in the future, as they become higher and if economic conditions change.

MDRC's welfare evaluations and field experience offer lessons about participation patterns, where participation is likely to fall off, and how to increase participation. This guide shares those lessons, offering practical advice to policymakers and welfare-to-work program administrators and staff.

Prepared with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, this book marks the sixth in a series of "how to" guides that are part of our ReWORKing Welfare technical assistance project. The project, under the direction of Amy Brown, seeks to distill, synthesize, and share lessons from our research and experience in the field to assist states and localities to make informed decisions in this new environment. The funders of ReWORKing Welfare are listed at the front of this guide.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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The Authors

I. Introduction

Welfare-to-work programs can include a variety of activities, such as job search assistance, skills training, and work experience. While different programs may use different strategies and offer different menus of activities, all share the goal — and the challenge — of moving welfare recipients into the workforce. Despite the fact that participation in welfare-to-work activities is generally required as a condition of receiving cash assistance, programs often have a difficult time engaging a significant portion of the welfare caseloads. This guide illuminates the issues, challenges, and trade-offs involved in increasing participation in welfare-to-work programs and offers advice and best practices for achieving higher participation levels.

The book is intended for policymakers as well as for administrators and staff in welfare and workforce development agencies, welfare-to-work programs, and community-based employment and training programs. Throughout the guide, the term *welfare-to-work program* is used to refer to all programs that aim to get welfare recipients into jobs. Programs using Welfare-to-Work grants from the U.S. Department of Labor may fall under this umbrella term, but here the term is used more broadly.[1]

It is also worth explaining at the outset one of the key points discussed in this guide: A program's participation rate depends on the *definition* of participation used by the program. As has already been noted, most states require welfare recipients to participate in employment-related activities. In the context of welfare-to-work programs, then, *participation* is usually defined as involvement in one or more specified program activities for a minimum number of hours per week or month. Many states' requirements reflect the definition of participation laid out in the federal welfare law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (a detailed description of the law's participation requirements can be found in section 5 of this guide and in the appendix).[2] It is important to keep in mind that many people may be involved in a program at a given point in time but not "count" as participating because they are not involved in a specified activity for the threshold number of hours.

1. How Important Is Participation?

Focusing on increasing participation in welfare-to-work programs can help achieve several key program goals:

- **Receiving full funding.** The 1996 federal welfare law requires states to engage a certain percentage of their caseload each year in employment-related activities. States that fail to do so can lose a portion of their

1. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 authorized the U.S. Department of Labor to provide Welfare-to-Work grants to states and local communities for the creation of additional job opportunities for the hardest-to-employ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and recent recipients. U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site.

2. Pub. L. No. 104-193. The PRWORA also changes aspects of other federal programs including the Food Stamp program, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, and child support enforcement. These changes will not be discussed in this guide.

funding under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the block grant created by the new law. While recent caseload declines have made it easier to meet the federal requirements, this is still an important issue for states.

- **Sending a new message about the nature of welfare.** A major impetus for welfare reform was the desire to change the culture of welfare — that is, to focus government agencies more on the task of getting people into work and to require welfare recipients to work or take steps toward self-sufficiency in order to receive assistance. Focusing on increasing participation helps promote this welfare culture change.
- **Preparing for welfare time limits.** The federal welfare law places a five-year time limit on the receipt of federally funded assistance for most families, and almost every state has instituted its own version of time limits. Time limits increase the pressure on welfare-to-work programs to help all welfare recipients become self-sufficient before they reach the end of aid and thus magnify the importance and urgency of increasing program participation.
- **Meeting outcome goals.** Many welfare-to-work programs have quantified targets for job placement or other program outcomes. In particular, contracts with employment and training service providers are increasingly outcome driven. Programs often find that one of their greatest challenges is bringing in enough participants to reach their outcome goals.

Increasing participation, however, must be weighed against other goals of welfare-to-work programs. As is discussed in this guide:

- **A program must reach a certain threshold of participation to achieve the goal of increasing employment and reducing welfare receipt. Beyond that threshold, however, it is unclear that increasing participation makes a difference.** In order to have an impact, a welfare-to-work program must involve significantly more individuals than would have participated in similar activities on their own. In other words, it is crucial that programs achieve participation rates above the level at which people would volunteer for services available in the community. Otherwise, the program accomplishes no more than would have occurred anyway. Provided that that level of participation is reached, however, research has not shown that the degree to which programs increase participation directly relates to further increases in job-finding and welfare exits. (See section 8 for more on this issue.)
- **Rates of participation — in and of themselves — may not be as crucial to increasing job-finding and welfare exits as the design and implementation of program activities.** Several factors may be more important than participation rates: whether the *types of activities*

in which people are engaged are the ones that can best enable them to become self-sufficient, *what* welfare recipients are doing while in those activities, and *who* is participating in the activities. In other words, it does not help to have a lot of people participating in activities if the activities are not effective and not appropriate for them.[5]

A Brief History of Participation Requirements

While the PRWORA has focused attention on participation, the issue is not new. A quick look at the history of participation requirements in the welfare system sheds light on their importance today.

The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program was created in 1935 to provide cash assistance to children deprived of the support of one of their parents — typically, children living with widowed mothers. Aid was provided primarily so that mothers would not be forced into the labor market and could remain at home to care for their children. Consequently, there was little focus on creating a reciprocal obligation or on helping recipients become self-sufficient.

Over time, however, providing open-ended income assistance for poor single mothers and their children became increasingly unpopular.[4] Over the past 30 years, many welfare reform measures have been designed to shift an income assistance program to a program that couples assistance with various education, training, and other job-related activities, all aimed at moving adult recipients into work.[5]

The Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA), the last major federal welfare reform prior to the 1996 law, for the first time required states to engage a specific proportion of AFDC recipients in work-related activities each month, through the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, or face possible reductions in federal funding.[6] In other words, the FSA instituted *participation requirements* for a portion of the AFDC caseload.

The 1996 law, which replaced AFDC and JOBS with the TANF block grant, continues down the path begun under the FSA and goes further. In general, compared with the FSA, the TANF requirements both raise the percentage of welfare recipients states must engage in work activities and more narrowly define what activities can count.

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3. For more information on the factors that contribute to effective welfare-to-work program design, see Bloom, 1997; and Brown, 1997.

4. Several trends may have contributed to this attitude shift: women's growing labor force participation, caseload growth, and shifts in the characteristics of AFDC recipients — from predominantly white widowed women and their children to a growing proportion of never-married, divorced, and non-white women and their children (from Bloom, 1997).

5. Data from the 1990s show that while fewer than 10 percent of AFDC families nationally reported any earned income in a typical month, almost all AFDC recipients have held a job at some point (Bloom, 1997). So, it is more accurate to say that reforms were aimed at moving individuals *back to employment* or into *more permanent, stable employment*.

6. Family Support Act of 1988, Pub. L. No. 100-485, 102 Stat. 2343.

2. Some Major Points

This guide covers many issues related to defining, measuring, and increasing rates of participation in welfare-to-work programs. Before the issues are discussed in detail, however, some key points and conclusions can be summarized:

- **It is worth trying to achieve high participation in welfare-to-work programs, but participation should not be the primary program goal.** The reasons for focusing on participation were presented in section 1; they include the requirements of the federal welfare law as well as the importance of participation in changing the culture of public assistance. At the same time, high levels of participation are only one goal of welfare-to-work programs; helping welfare recipients move to employment should be the primary goal.

- **Achieving high rates of participation takes time and resources.** Greatly increasing program participation requires a commitment of staff time and resources. Effort must be made to reach out to potential participants, monitor progress, and reengage those who drop out. Research has shown that programs must work with almost *all* welfare clients in order to have a substantial subset actually "count" as participating in any given month.

- **100 percent participation is not a realistic goal.** The degree of difficulty programs may face in achieving high participation rates depends in part on how participation is defined. Even if funding is plentiful and case management flawless, however, a portion of the welfare caseload will likely not be active in a given month for unavoidable reasons, such as waiting for a new class to begin or dealing with medical problems.

- **Higher rates of sanctioning do not necessarily result in higher participation levels.** Many welfare-to-work programs impose financial sanctions (that is, reductions in welfare grant levels) for noncompliance with participation requirements. The research suggests that enforcement of a participation mandate is needed to increase participation levels above those that would have occurred in the absence of a program. In the context of a "high-enforcement" program, however, programs with the highest levels of sanctioning are no more successful at increasing participation than those with moderate sanctioning levels. (See section 9 for more detail.)

3. About This Guide

This guide uses research conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), as well as findings from other studies, to explore the nature of welfare-to-work program participation and to suggest ways for states, localities, and community-based organizations to increase participation. Most of the research discussed was conducted on programs that began prior to the passage of the 1996 welfare law. These programs did not operate under time limits on welfare receipt. They generally exempted more people from a participation requirement than is now the case, and they had less severe financial penalties for nonparticipation than some states are now invoking. The programs studied, however, all shared the PRWORA's goals of requiring welfare recipients to "do something" in exchange for their benefits and of moving large numbers of people into paid work and off assistance.

Findings from research, given that they are grounded in systematic analyses, offer insights into current participation mandates. Because programs contain multiple elements, however, it is often hard to determine exactly which aspects led to increased participation. Therefore, this guide also offers additional strategies based on program experience and the recommendations of administrators, staff, and other experts, who have found that those strategies help them to engage and retain participants. To help readers distinguish between these two levels of evidence, we have labeled the suggestions in Parts III through V in two ways: "Lessons from the Research" and "Recommendations from Program Experience."

How This Guide Is Organized

The remainder of this guide begins with a background discussion of participation (Part II): how it can be measured, what the 1996 welfare law mandates regarding participation, maximum participation rates that can reasonably be expected, how different welfare reform approaches can affect participation, how participation relates to such outcomes as increased employment or decreased welfare use, the relationship between sanctioning and participation, and the financial costs of increasing participation. These sections may be of most use to policymakers and welfare-to-work program administrators.

Parts III to V then suggest strategies that state and local officials can use to increase participation in welfare-to-work programs. These sections should be useful to all administrators and staff involved in welfare-to-work programs. Included are discussions of how to increase the number of people who "get in the door" of programs (Part III), how to maintain ongoing participation (Part IV), and how to increase participation particularly among the most "disadvantaged" portions of the welfare caseload, often considered the "hard to serve" (Part V).

Much of the material throughout the guide is presented as "bulleted" points and checklists. The bullets are intended to highlight topic areas and thus make the guide easier to use. The checklists provide specific suggestions for readers.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is intended for the use of policymakers, administrators, and staff in welfare-to-work programs who want to make informed decisions about whether and how to increase participation in their programs. We realize that not all of the information contained in this guide will be relevant to all readers. We therefore recommend that readers use the table of contents to quickly identify and turn to those sections relevant to their own work.

In particular, we have in mind readers from the following groups:

- **People involved in designing welfare-to-work policies and programs.** These may include state and local legislators, governors, mayors and county executives, members of their staffs, members of Workforce Development Boards, and others. These people need to understand the big picture of what participation means, how it interacts with other welfare reform policies and goals, and what challenges and trade-offs are involved in increasing participation in welfare-to-work activities.
- **Programs operated by state, county, or city welfare agencies.** Welfare-to-work programs have been in place for many years, but they have significantly expanded and sharpened their focus since passage of the new federal law. Welfare recipients are generally required to participate in these programs as a condition of receiving assistance. The challenges these programs face regarding participation include bringing people in and building the capacity to serve the entire mandatory caseload.
- **Programs operated by local workforce agencies.** In some localities, the workforce agency operates the welfare-to-work program, as just described. In addition, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act created Welfare-to-Work grants, which are distributed, through states, to local Private Industry Councils (also called Workforce Development Boards). These funds are targeted to certain groups considered hard to employ, including long-term welfare recipients, those with low literacy levels, substance abusers, and certain noncustodial parents of children on welfare. Often, one challenge for these programs is coordinating with the welfare agency to identify and refer eligible individuals.
- **Community-based employment and training programs.** These programs may be involved in welfare-to-work activities in several ways. First, they may have a contract with the local welfare or workforce agency to serve mandatory participants. Often these contracts are performance based, with funding tied to the number of welfare recipients served and the number who find and retain jobs. Second, many community-based organizations have received Welfare-to-Work grants from the Department of Labor through a competitive grant application. Those

funds have the same target-group limitations as the grants to workforce agencies just described. Finally, many community-based organizations operate their own employment and training programs serving voluntary participants from the community. Since the enactment of welfare reform legislation, many of these programs have tried to expand their services and more effectively serve a welfare population. Often they have faced the need to alter their services to fit the local definition of participation so that they can continue to work with welfare recipients.

What This Guide Does *Not* Do

It is important for readers to understand what this guide does and does not offer. This guide focuses on strategies for increasing participation in welfare-to-work programs, *not* on practices to increase job-finding or welfare exits. As is discussed in section 8, there is not always a clear relationship between participation and program effectiveness. While some participation-increasing strategies also increase employment or decrease welfare receipt, others do not have a clear connection to these outcomes.

In addition, given its narrow focus on participation, the guide does *not* provide general guidelines on how to operate welfare-to-work programs. Program managers need to be concerned with many aspects of operations, not just those that relate to engaging and retaining participants. The operational suggestions contained here pertain only to those aspects that affect participation.

Finally, the guide focuses broadly on efforts to increase participation. It does *not* make suggestions about *whom* to involve in welfare-to-work programs or *when* to involve them. These issues may be important to programs that have limited resources or cannot serve all potential participants immediately.

For information on many of the issues not discussed in this guide, we suggest that readers turn to the other publications in this series of "how to" guides, including *After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States* and *Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform*.

II.

Setting the Stage: Some Background on Participation

Before thinking about *increasing* participation, it is important to understand some basics about participation itself. Part II of this guide first discusses various ways welfare-to-work program participation can be calculated. It then summarizes the participation requirements of the 1996 welfare law and presents some of the barriers to achieving high participation rates. Next, we review several welfare reform approaches and their effects on participation and examine the relationship between participation and the ultimate goal of welfare-to-work programs, namely, to move people into jobs and off government assistance. That is followed by an examination of the relationship between sanctioning (the imposition of financial penalties) and participation. Part II concludes by discussing how increasing participation affects program costs.

4. Defining and Calculating Participation

How Is Participation Counted?

A *participation rate* is a ratio; it represents who is participating out of all those expected to participate. Three elements affect the magnitude of this ratio:

- **The definition of a participant.** This first element is the numerator of the participation ratio. Who counts as a participant depends upon what activities are allowed and how much time an individual must spend in an activity to be credited as participating. The 1996 federal law, compared with JOBS program regulations, narrowed the range of allowable, or countable, work-related activities. In addition, the law increased the amount of time that a person must spend in an activity in order to be counted as a participant. (See section 5 for details on countable activities and hours requirements under TANF.) The federal definition applies to participation rates that states must meet in order to receive full block grant funding. For their own welfare-to-work programs, many states have adopted alternative definitions of who counts as a participant, some more narrow than the federal law.

- **The base of people mandated to participate.** The second element is the denominator of the participation ratio: the number of people who are expected to participate. This base may differ depending on who operates the program. For example, in a contracted agency, the base may include all those welfare recipients referred by the welfare agency for employment assistance. In calculating state participation rates for TANF purposes, the definition established in the 1996 law counts in the base almost all adult heads of families receiving TANF assistance. (Again, see section 5 for details.) The new law dramatically increased this base over that of the previous JOBS program, which allowed individuals to be exempted from participating for a variety of reasons. As with the numerator, many states

have adopted their own definitions of who must participate, often maintaining certain categories of exemption, such as exemption for medical reasons.

- **The period of measurement.** The third element that affects the participation ratio is the length of time over which the ratio is measured. For example, participation could be measured weekly, monthly, or over a longer period. The PRWORA, like the FSA, requires a *monthly* measure of participation — that is, the ratio describes the proportion of welfare recipients expected to participate who spent at least a minimum number of hours in allowable activities during a month. The monthly rate is calculated on the basis of the average number of hours of participation per week of the month. The participation rates for each month of the fiscal year are then averaged to get an annual participation rate.

Examples of Participation Rates Using Different Definitions

In order to understand how "high" or "low" a participation rate is, it is necessary to understand how the rate was calculated using these three elements. Table 1 illustrates how participation in the same programs can be measured in different ways, yielding very different rates. The table uses findings from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS Evaluation), which calculated participation rates in different ways across three sites (Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Riverside, California).[1] The resulting rates varied widely with changes in the method of calculation. Note that each of these sites was "successful" in the sense that it vigorously enforced the participation mandate, reduced welfare payments, and increased employment over a two-year follow-up period.

In the table, method ❶ presents a participation rate calculation close (but not identical) to the method mandated in the 1996 federal law. Using this method of calculation, just 5 to 10 percent of all welfare cases in a month participated at least 20 hours or were employed at least 15 hours per week in every week of a month. If, however, as shown in calculation method ❷, individuals in sanction status and those who participated at all during a month (not necessarily for a certain number of hours) can be counted as participants, and individuals who qualify for exemptions from participation are removed from the base of the calculation, then the participation rate in the three sites increases to between 35 and 44 percent. Both methods ❶ and ❷ present *monthly point-in-time* participation rates. Method ❸ expands the period of measurement. This *longitudinal* participation rate counts all people who participated at all in a two-year period and reflects the chances that welfare recipients will *ever* participate. As

1 The NEWWS Evaluation is being conducted by MDRC and is being funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with additional support from the U.S. Department of Education.

the table shows, this calculation yields the highest range of rates in the three sites.

Research on participation in welfare-to-work programs has typically examined longitudinal participation rates (method ❸ in the table). For that reason, this guide will most commonly refer to longitudinal rates, even though a monthly point-in-time rate (as in method ❶ in the table) is closer to the calculation required in the federal welfare law. Some studies have also examined monthly point-in-time rates, and those rates will be provided when they are available.

Table 1

Methods of Calculating Participation Rates

Definition of a Participant				
Statuses Counted in Numerator of Participation Rate	**Level of Involvement Required in Order to be Counted as a Participant**	**Base**	**Period of Measurement**	**Range of Rates in the Three Sites**
❶ Participated in JOBS activities *or* employed while receiving AFDC	Participated at least 20 hours per week in every week *or* employed at least 15 hours per week in every week	All AFDC cases in the month	Month	5–10%
❷ Participated in JOBS activities *or* employed while receiving AFDC *or* sanction imposed or requested	Participated *at all* in *month or* employed *at all* in *month or* sanction imposed or requested *at all* in *month*	All JOBS-mandatory individuals in the month	Month	35–44%
❸ Participated in JOBS activities	Participated *at all* in two years following program entry (orientation)	All JOBS-mandatory individuals entering program in a year	Two years after program entry	44–74%

SOURCE: Hamilton, 1995.

5. The 1996 Federal Welfare Law

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 replaced the previous AFDC program with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The new program provides block grants to states and gives states great flexibility in how they design and operate public assistance programs. The law also places some requirements on states, most notably that they not use federal funds to provide assistance to an adult who has received TANF for five years and that they engage a certain percentage of their caseload in employment or work-related activities. This section primarily describes the latter requirement. The appendix provides additional details on the federal law.

Who Must Participate in Work or Work-Related Activities?

It is important to understand that the PRWORA does not directly require welfare recipients to work, nor does it limit the types of activities in which they can participate. Instead, the law places requirements on *states* to engage an increasing percentage of welfare recipients in defined activities; states that do not meet these rates face a reduction in the amount of their federal block grant. The state flexibility under the PRWORA works both ways: states may establish their own participation requirements, making them broader or narrower than those in the federal law.

States also have flexibility in deciding who is required to participate. The federal law does not include the automatic exemption categories from participation under JOBS.[2] States may therefore mandate participation for everyone or establish their own exemptions. In calculating participation for purposes of meeting the federal requirements, however, the base or denominator of the participation rate generally includes *all* cases receiving TANF "assistance" that include an adult. *Assistance* is defined as cash payments and other benefits designed to meet a family's ongoing basic needs, as well as support services for families that are not employed. Several types of benefits and services that can be provided with TANF funds are excluded from the definition of assistance; these include short-term assistance, work subsidies, and support services for low-income working families. Families receiving these types of benefits are not included in the participation calculation (and receipt of these benefits is not time limited). Throughout this guide, the term *assistance* is used to indicate the narrower definition presented above.

2 Under the FSA, states could not require JOBS participation from a person who was employed 30 or more hours a week, the parent of a child under the age of 3 (or under the age of 1, at state option); ill or incapacitated, or taking care of a household member who was ill or incapacitated; under the age of 16 or of advanced age; pregnant and past the first trimester; or living in an area where program services were unavailable.

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Thus, compared with the FSA, the PRWORA expands the categories of welfare recipients who count in the denominator of the participation calculation. The largest new categories are single parents with any children younger than 5 (though states can choose to exempt single parents with a child under age 1) and people who are ill or incapacitated or taking care of a household member who is ill or incapacitated. It is likely that some of the people in these newly mandated categories will face substantial barriers to work and participation.

Who Can Count as a Participant?

To count toward the numerator of the monthly participation rate that states must meet, a welfare recipient must be in an allowable activity for at least a minimum average number of hours per week: 20 to 30 hours per week (depending on the year) for all families, 20 hours per week for single parents with children under 6, and 35 hours per week for two-parent families. Generally, at least 20 hours of the participation must be in one of a set of allowable activities that includes subsidized and unsubsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, and community service programs. Job search is allowable, but only for six weeks per person in most cases, and only four can be consecutive. Vocational educational training is permitted for up to 12 months per person, but there is a cap on the number of people who can meet the requirements through this activity.

Teenage heads of household can count toward the participation rate by maintaining satisfactory attendance in high school or the equivalent (regardless of the number of hours) or by participating in education directly related to employment for at least 20 hours per week. For non-teenage recipients, education and training activities beyond the allowable 12 months of vocational training can only be counted as *supplementary* hours of participation. For example, if a person must participate for at least 25 hours per week to be counted in the TANF rate, she can participate in subsidized employment for 20 hours per week and in job skills training for the remaining 5 hours.

Again, it is important to remember that although the PRWORA limits the conditions under which education, training, and job search (the most frequently used activities under JOBS) count toward the participation rates, states are free to use TANF funds to provide these services and to require welfare recipients to participate in them.

What Rates Do States Need to Meet?

In the 1997 fiscal year, states were required to have 25 percent of all families receiving TANF meet the participation definition in the new law. This rate increased to 30 percent in 1998, is 35 percent in 1999, will rise to 40 percent in 2000, and will reach 50 percent in 2002. The separate, higher rate for two-parent families was 75 percent in 1997 and 1998 and increased to 90 percent

for 1999 forward. The yearly rates are calculated by averaging the 12 monthly rates. If a state does not meet these rates, it could face a reduction in its block grant.[3]

States can lower these required participation rates by reducing their TANF caseload. The rate is reduced by the number of percentage points by which the state's caseload is lower than its fiscal year 1995 caseload. Thus, if a state successfully moves people off assistance, the proportion of its remaining caseload that it will be required to engage in work or work-related activities will be smaller. A state's ability to achieve a caseload reduction will be affected both by the quality of its welfare-to-work programs and by the economic climate. As of this writing, almost all states have, in fact, substantially reduced their welfare caseloads. Between January 1995 and June 1998, the number of welfare recipients nationwide decreased by about 5.5 million, or 40 percent; all states but one experienced a caseload decline.[4]

Data submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services from 36 states indicated that for fiscal year 1997, all of them met the required participation rate for that year.[5] In 10 of the 36 reporting states, fewer than 25 percent of the welfare cases had an adult working or participating in a work-related activity, but the states met a lower rate based on caseload reductions. Of the 32 states that reported data on two-parent families, 17 did not meet the two-parent 1997 participation rate of 75 percent, even taking welfare caseload reductions into account. (Two-parent families, however, account for only about 7 percent of all families receiving welfare.)

As these data illustrate, the recent dramatic reductions in states' welfare caseloads have aided states in meeting the new participation standards, at least in the early years under PRWORA. States may face greater challenges in future years when the targeted rates are much higher, especially if economic conditions worsen, causing welfare caseloads to increase. State-level policymakers reading this guide should take note of the opportunities they have now, when the federal rates are more easily achievable and program resources plentiful, as well as the trade-offs they may face in later years when the rates may be more difficult to achieve.

How Are These Standards Different from the Previous Law?

The participation standards under the PRWORA (as defined earlier in this section) are significantly more stringent than those in the JOBS program. Almost all adults receiving TANF assistance can be mandated to participate and are counted in the denominator of the participation rate. The numerator of the rate is also

3 The federal law also requires that a state replace with state dollars all federal funds lost as a result of penalty.

4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Web site.

5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Web site.

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more difficult to achieve; the range of allowable activities is much narrower, the number of hours a person must spend in activities each week is higher, and the percentage of the caseload that must participate is greater. At the same time, the provision in the new law that allows states to meet lower participation rates based on caseload reductions has generally made those rates much easier to meet, at least in the short term.

Other PRWORA Provisions Relevant to Participation

In addition to the participation rates just described, other aspects of the 1996 federal welfare law are relevant to a discussion of participation. The following provisions should be considered by states as they make decisions about participation strategies and goals.

- **Time limit on assistance.** As defined earlier, individuals may not receive federally funded TANF assistance for more than a total of five years over their lifetime, and many states have instituted their own shorter time limits on welfare. Some welfare recipients receive benefits for a limited period and then permanently leave the rolls. Others, however, cycle on and off assistance, and still others remain on welfare for extended periods.[6] Although at any time a state may exempt up to 20 percent of its caseload from the five-year federal limit, it is unlikely that this 20 percent will cover everyone who eventually reaches a time limit.

  Time limits magnify the need for states to help *all* recipients become self-sufficient. In addition, under time limits, it will not be enough simply to get a job; people must *keep* their jobs or have the skills and opportunity to move to another job if one ends. So, while time limits on the one hand make it especially important for welfare-to-work programs to achieve high levels of participation, time limits are also a reminder that participation is not an end in itself.

- **Two-year work requirement.** Parents must engage in work once they have received assistance for 24 months. States have the ability to define "work" for the purposes of this requirement. Some states have implemented work experience programs that require welfare recipients to work in community service jobs after a certain time on assistance. Several states require that recipients engage in job search or work as soon as they apply for or are approved for assistance.

- **No guarantee of child care or transportation assistance.** The FSA required states to provide child care and transportation assistance for those who needed it in order to participate in employment-related

6 See, for example, Bane and Ellwood, 1983.

activities. The 1996 law does not. (It does, however, prevent states from imposing financial sanctions on parents of young children if they do not participate because they cannot find appropriate child care.) States must therefore make their own decisions about whether and to what extent they will provide these services. In general, states have continued and expanded these types of supports.

- **Sanctions for nonparticipation.** The federal law requires states to reduce assistance to welfare recipients who refuse to participate in employment-related activities. Most states reduce recipients' welfare grants, or impose temporary *partial grant sanctions*, for noncompliance with program requirements. About a dozen states use temporary *full grant sanctions*, which discontinue the family's entire grant as penalty for not complying with work or participation requirements. Five states permanently terminate benefits for recipients with more than two instances of noncompliance.[7]

- **Funding flexibility.** Under TANF, states receive a block grant from the federal government and are also required to continue a minimum level of state spending on assistance. There are three ways in which states can use these sources of funding, and each has implications for the calculation of participation rates.[8] The simplest and most common approach is to blend the federal and state funds in a single welfare program. Recipients of assistance funded in this manner are subject to all TANF provisions and requirements.

A second approach is to run a single welfare program but account separately for federal and state spending. Within the program, some recipients would get assistance from federal dollars, while others get assistance from state dollars. Those receiving state-only dollars do not count toward the federal time limit but do count toward the participation rate. State funding can be used, for example, to provide assistance to low-income working people who are still eligible to receive small welfare grants. Those workers help the state meet its participation rate without having their minimal aid count toward their lifetime limit.

Third, states can use their own funding to develop programs separate from TANF. Assistance under a state program is not subject to the federal time limit, nor are recipients counted in the participation rates. This funding stream can be used, for example, to establish a program for people engaged in state-approved activities that do not count toward the federal rates (such as those in substance abuse treatment programs).

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7. Burke, 1998.
8. CLASP, 1998.

What Priority Should States Place on Trying to Meet Federal Participation Requirements?

Because participation is only one goal of welfare-to-work programs, states need to consider the extent to which the federal rates will drive their welfare reform efforts. This may not be an issue now, when caseload reductions make it easy for most states to meet the federal rates, but it may become more important in the future if states face difficulty meeting the increasing rates. The decision about how much emphasis to place on meeting the federal requirements will be driven partly by financial considerations. If states fail to meet the rates, they face a reduction in the amount of TANF funding they receive (and they must make up for the reduction with increased state spending). In addition, and perhaps of greater fiscal consequence to states, states not meeting the participation requirements must maintain 80 percent of historic state spending, as opposed to only 75 percent if they meet the rates.

As with many of the issues discussed in this guide, however, the choices states make will also depend on their goals. If a primary goal is to enforce a reciprocal obligation between the state and welfare recipients (that is, require participation in return for benefits), then focusing on participation — and meeting the TANF levels — may follow naturally. If, on the other hand, a key goal is to encourage recipients to increase their skill levels, a state may decide to allow more participation in education and training (activities that may not count toward the federal requirement). States may also choose to divert resources from welfare-to-work activities to postemployment services in order to promote sustained employment. While these states may achieve somewhat lower participation rates, they may decide that the federal lifetime time limit makes *permanently* moving welfare recipients into the labor market a more important long-term goal.

6. Limits to Increasing Participation

It is natural to wonder why the welfare law does not set as a goal that states achieve 100 percent participation. This section addresses this issue, using research findings from the NEWWS Evaluation to illustrate the limits to increasing participation.

The three NEWWS sites mentioned earlier (Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside) all ran strong programs that promoted participation. In the three sites, however, only about 9 percent of those required to participate in welfare-to-work activities actually met the definition of a participant — as defined under the FSA — in a typical month. In other words, only 9 percent participated in an approved activity for at least 20 hours or were employed at least 15 hours per week in every week of the month. This rate calculation is somewhat similar to that used to determine the TANF rate, although the TANF calculation uses a

narrower definition of who can "count" in the numerator and increases the number of people who are included in the base of the ratio.

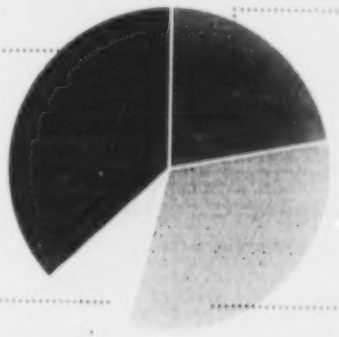
The following research findings illuminate the challenge of achieving high program participation:

- **Even in a well-funded and well-managed program, a substantial portion of a caseload will not be participating in a given month for unavoidable reasons.**

In the example just cited, why weren't the other 91 percent participating? As Figure 1 shows, just over a third (37 percent) of those required to participate had not yet attended an orientation. About a fifth (22 percent) had attended an orientation but did not participate in JOBS in that particular month. A third (32 percent) did participate, but not enough to meet the hours threshold.

Figure 1

Program Statuses in a Typical Month


Have not attended orientation (37%)
May be awaiting orientation or may have failed to attend orientation
Attended orientation but not involved in JOBS (22%)
Reason may be correctable (e.g., child care issues) or unrelated to funding or case management (e.g., individual or family member ill or incapacitated)
Met JOBS participation requirements (9%)
Participated at least 20 hours per week or employed at least 15 hours per week
Involved in JOBS, but did not meet participation requirements (32%)
Participated less than 20 hours per week, or employed less than 15 hours per week, or sanctioned or slated to be sanctioned

SOURCE: Hamilton, 1995.

Some of the reasons for nonparticipation may be correctable; tight case monitoring and close scheduling of activities can encourage people to enter activities more quickly and minimize the down time. Yet other reasons for nonparticipation may be outside the purview of a program. For example, some clients become ill or must care for an ill family member.[9] Similar reasons for nonparticipation were found in the Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM) program in the 1980s.[10] Even if funding is sufficient and case management and tracking are flawless, many welfare recipients will not count as participating in a given month.

9. Hamilton, 1995.
10. Hamilton, 1988.

- **To engage even a small portion of a caseload, a program must work with, and thus spend money on, nearly all potential participants.**

The example described shows that staff can be processing, monitoring, or working with (and thus expending funds on) *all* targeted welfare recipients in a month but, in a typical month, only a small subset will be fully engaged in activities (9 percent in the example). Therefore, in order to have a given number of recipients count toward participation rates, programs must reach out to many more potential participants than those represented in the participation rate goal. Staff time is required to refer and orient people to the program, determine their initial and subsequent activity assignments, monitor their attendance, and initiate the sanctioning process for those who fail to participate without a good reason. As a result, staff can spend almost as much time, and in some cases even more time, on nonparticipants as they do on participants.

- **The definition of who is "mandatory" for the program can affect the proportion of the caseload that participates and the participation rates the program achieves.**

Most welfare-to-work programs primarily serve people who are required to participate. The definition of who is mandatory affects participation in two key ways. A narrower definition limits the proportion of a total caseload likely to participate, but a broader definition can increase the challenge of getting all those who are mandatory into the program and keeping them engaged in program activities.

Data from programs operated prior to the PRWORA illustrate how the definition can limit the proportion of people likely to participate. The FSA mandated participation from parents with children 3 and older, but states could opt to require participation from parents with children as young as 1. When they were studied in the NEWWS Evaluation, Riverside mandated participation from parents with children 3 or older, and Grand Rapids mandated participation from parents with children 1 or older, a broader group. Owing largely to these different definitions, in a typical month only one-quarter of all AFDC cases in Riverside were mandatory for the JOBS program, compared with about three-quarters of all AFDC cases in a month in Grand Rapids. Reflecting this difference, only 4 percent of *all* AFDC cases in a month in Riverside had an adult participating in JOBS during a typical month, compared with 16 percent in Grand Rapids.[11]

Many states have chosen to exempt parents with children younger than 1, as allowed under the PRWORA, and thus have narrowed their pool of eligible participants.[12] When a state exempts these parents, however, they are not counted

11 While the different definitions of who was mandatory explain most of the difference in the participation rates presented, some of the difference reflects a higher participation rate in Grand Rapids when considering only those mandatory. See Hamilton, 1995.

12 Gallagher et al., 1998.

in the denominator of the TANF participation rate. If child care for very young children is difficult to come by in the state, it may be prudent to exempt this group, as these parents may be more difficult to engage in program activities or work and thus reduce participation rates. (See more on this issue in Part IV.)

7. Welfare Reform Approaches and Participation Rates

Welfare reform initiatives use different approaches to move people into the labor market and off welfare. This section discusses the relationship between various common strategies — emphasizing job search through a *labor force attachment* (LFA) program approach, emphasizing education or training in a *human capital development* (HCD) approach, offering *financial incentives*, and placing *time limits* on welfare benefits — and rates of participation in program activities. Studies have found that:

- **Different sites implementing the same program model can have widely varying participation rates.**

For example, MDRC studied six counties in California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program. Each of these counties implemented the basic GAIN model, which included an initial, formal assessment followed by separation of the caseload into two streams: one, determined not to be in need of basic education, was assigned to job search. The second, determined to need basic education, was assigned to basic education or, in some instances, to training programs. Though each of the counties implemented the same basic approach, longitudinal participation rates, covering about a one-year follow-up period, differed by as much as 20 percentage points between counties.[13]

- **Emphasizing quick employment versus skill development does not differentially affect the chances that a welfare recipient will ever participate.**

The NEWWS Evaluation provides a direct test of this relationship. Three sites (Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside) ran two types of welfare-to-work programs side by side. One encouraged individuals to take jobs, even low-paying ones, to gain entry into the labor market (a labor force attachment approach); the other emphasized building skills through formal education and, to a lesser extent, training as the primary path to self-sufficiency (a human capital development approach). In each site, these two programs provided qualitatively different experiences for participants regarding the messages about employment

13 Riccio and Friedlander, 1992. MDRC found that differences in the rates of participation among counties could be attributed to the local supply of services as well as to the extent to which case managers and administrators emphasized enforcement of penalties for nonparticipation or, on the other hand, gave personalized attention to clients. Waiting lists for activities also contributed to lower participation in some counties.

and emphasized different services, but they were equally mandatory. Despite the fundamental differences in program approach, roughly similar longitudinal participation rates, reflecting the chances that an individual would eventually participate, were found for the different programs within each site during a two-year follow-up period.[14]

- **An emphasis on skill development, however, can result in higher monthly participation rates, largely because activities are more seamless.**

When people move from one activity to another in a welfare-to-work program, the "in-between" periods can cause monthly participation rates to drop. Programs emphasizing quick employment tend to have more short-term components; for example, a participant may move from job readiness training to job search, to work experience, then back to job search. In contrast, programs that emphasize education and training often have activities that are both longer-term and more seamless. Consequently, for example, in the NEWWS Evaluation there was a greater likelihood in the human capital programs, compared with the labor force attachment programs, that an individual would be participating in a program activity at some point during a typical month.[15]

The 1996 welfare law, however, limits the extent to which participation in education and training activities can be used to count in the participation rate (see the appendix for details). When focusing on meeting TANF participation rates, then, program operators need to consider the advantages of these types of activities in light of the limit.

- **Welfare recipients' characteristics can affect participation in certain activities.**

In a study of West Virginia's community work experience program in the 1980s, male members of two-parent families participated in work experience at a dramatically higher rate than predominantly female household heads of single-parent cases; at least 40 percent of two-parent sample members, depending on the county, were placed and participated in a work experience assignment, while just 24 percent of single-parent sample members participated.[16]

Interviews with program staff revealed that staff had more difficulty assigning women to a work site, compared with the men. Less than half of the single-parent sample members had a high school diploma or GED, and only a small proportion had recent work experience. These educational deficiencies, along with a lack of clerical skills, limited the number of women who could meet the requirements for work experience placements. In addition, mothers tended to have more health problems and a greater hesitation to leave their children than did the fathers in two-parent households. (Normally, child care needs also differ

14. Hamilton et al., 1997.
15. Hamilton, 1995.
16. Friedlander et al., 1986.

between these two groups, but none of the women who were required to participate in the West Virginia program had preschool-age children.)[17]

- **"Readiness" classes do not seem to affect subsequent program participation.**

Some programs offer activities designed to increase participants' "readiness" for the labor market. These include workshops in basic work habits, life skills, or self-esteem. Such activities are intended to help participants by teaching them so-called "soft skills," motivating them, and helping them focus on what they want to do with their lives. While the activities may yield all these benefits, there is no empirical evidence that they increase participation in subsequent program activities.

- **Policies that encourage people to combine work and welfare, such as financial incentives, can increase monthly participation rates under the new welfare law.**

People who have jobs but still receive partial welfare grants count in the numerator of the participation rate in the 1996 law as long as they work enough hours per week to meet the hourly threshold. These people can greatly increase participation rates. For example, in the NEWWS Evaluation sites mentioned earlier, when employment while on welfare was counted in the monthly participation rate, the rate for some of the labor force attachment programs doubled.[18]

Financial incentives allow welfare recipients who work to keep more of their monthly welfare grants, because more of their earnings are disregarded when their benefit amount is calculated. Financial incentives encourage work by making work pay and also allow workers to remain on welfare after their earnings would have otherwise exceeded eligibility limits. Both of these factors can increase participation rates.

MDRC is studying a program in Minnesota that combines financial incentives with a mandatory welfare-to-work program. The study is able to examine separately the effects of the financial incentives and the effects of the welfare-to-work program. The data show that financial incentives did not affect rates of participation in program activities, such as education and training. The incentives did, however, produce an impact on employment levels and on the proportion of people who combined work and welfare.[19]

Program administrators interested in promoting the combining of work and welfare should bear in mind three important points. First, because financial in-

17. Friedlander et al., 1986.

18. Hamilton, 1995.

19. The impact was for single-parent, long-term recipients living in urban areas in the 18-month period studied. Financial incentives *in combination with* mandatory program services substantially increased employment levels (Miller et al., 1997). In another program (in Vermont), financial incentives did not increase participation rates and did not increase employment over a 21-month follow-up period. The incentives did increase the proportion working and receiving welfare at the *end* of the follow-up period. (See Bloom, Michalopoulos, et al., 1998.)

centives allow people to remain on welfare longer, they may cause people to reach time limits more quickly than they otherwise would have. Staff can help those recipients make informed decisions about whether and how long they will continue to receive a partial welfare grant. As mentioned in section 5, states can use segregated state funds to cover grants for working people. This approach allows these workers to count toward the participation rate without their small grants counting toward their lifetime aid limit.

Second, combining work and welfare may not be possible in some states. In states with low monthly assistance grants (and without generous income disregards), any job that meets the hourly threshold for participation is likely to make a worker ineligible for assistance. Third, it should be remembered that persons who go to work and leave welfare (that is, reduce the welfare caseload) also help states meet the federal law by reducing the required participation rate.

▶ **Time limits on welfare may affect the *timing* of participation.**

It is possible that the knowledge that one's welfare benefits will eventually run out may spur some people to participate who would not otherwise have done so. Researchers have not yet explored this issue. Studies in states that implemented time limits in their welfare programs prior to the 1996 welfare reform law offer evidence that a time limit, however, may affect the *timing* of participation. MDRC is currently evaluating Florida's initial time-limited welfare program. In a survey, a majority of people who were subject to the time limit reported that because of the time limit they decided to start an education or training program earlier than they otherwise would have done.[20]

8. The Relationship Between Participation and Program Effectiveness

As was noted earlier, participation is only one goal of welfare-to-work programs. While there are reasons to promote participation as an end in itself (for example, to create a mutual obligation between government and welfare recipients), the larger goals of welfare-to-work programs are to increase employment and reduce welfare receipt. This section looks at whether programs that have had higher levels of participation have also been more successful at moving people into the workforce and off public assistance.

In general, the research shows that in order for a program to increase employment and welfare exits, it is important to involve in program activities people who normally would not participate in them. In other words, programs must achieve participation rates above the level at which people would voluntarily engage in work-related activities. (This level varies by locality.) Once this participation benchmark is achieved, however, research does not suggest a simple

20. Bloom, Farrell, et al., 1998.

formula whereby employment and welfare exits increase by a certain percentage for every increase in a participation rate. More specifically, studies have found that:

- **Many welfare recipients participate in employment-related activities on their own, even without welfare-to-work programs.**

In *random assignment* evaluations of welfare-to-work programs, a control group is used to represent what people would do on their own in the absence of a mandatory welfare-to-work program. Welfare recipients who are eligible for the program are assigned, by chance, to one of two groups: a *program group*, which is eligible for program services and subject to program participation requirements, or a *control group*, which is not. The two groups are then studied throughout a follow-up period, usually lasting several years. Because people are assigned to the two groups through a random process, there are no systematic differences between the groups' members when they enter the study. Thus, any differences that emerge between the groups during the follow-up period, in such outcomes as average earnings or welfare receipt, can reliably be attributed to the program being studied. These differences are known as *impacts*.

In evaluations of welfare-to-work programs, roughly one-fifth to two-fifths of control group members have enrolled in employment and training activities available in their communities on their own — not as part of mandatory welfare-to-work programs — within a two-year follow-up period. Control group members who participated in such activities on their own more commonly took part in education and training activities (such as vocational training, college, or basic education) than in job search, work experience, or on-the-job training activities. The rate of participation for control group members has varied according to the availability of low-cost education and training programs in each community, as well as differences in the background characteristics of the control group members. Control group participation levels have generally been higher for people with high school diplomas or GED certificates and prior work experience, because community education and training programs often require high school diplomas and related work experience for admission.[21]

- **Programs must increase the level of participation beyond what would have occurred anyway in order to have the potential to make a difference.**

Given that many welfare recipients participate in employment-related activities without welfare-to-work programs, programs must significantly increase this level of activity — that is, produce positive *participation impacts* — in order to have the potential to increase the rate at which people find jobs and leave the welfare rolls. Programs must augment the participation that would have occurred anyway, by increasing either the *number* of people who partici-

21 See Freedman et al., forthcoming, 1999.

pate or the *length of time* or *number of hours* that people participate.

In the past, some programs have given priority to those welfare recipients who, while required to participate in the program, "volunteered" for services. Programs used this approach both to ration services when they did not have the resources to serve everyone and to work with more motivated participants. This approach, however, generally did not substantially increase the number of participants beyond the number who would have participated on their own, in the absence of the program. As a consequence, it did not result in large impacts on employment, earnings, and welfare receipt.[22]

▶ **Programs with the largest participation impacts, however, do not necessarily have the largest employment or welfare impacts.**

Connecting program practices to impacts on employment or welfare receipt is fraught with methodological difficulties.[23] The available evidence, however, suggests that while a program must increase participation beyond what would have occurred in the absence of the program in order to have the *potential* to produce employment and welfare impacts, programs with the largest participation impacts (increases) are not necessarily those with the largest employment or welfare impacts.

In the NEWWS Evaluation, for example, the program with the largest impact on participation did not have the largest earnings and welfare impacts. A program in Riverside (one of two program models studied in the site) increased the proportion of people who ever participated in employment-related activities over the course of two years by 40 percentage points (65 percent of those in the program group participated, compared with 25 percent of those in a control group). This was the greatest participation increase among 11 programs studied. Yet the same program's two-year earnings and welfare impacts were not among the largest in the study.[24] In the NEWWS Evaluation, there also was no clear correlation between participation *rates* — neither longitudinal nor monthly rates — and employment and welfare impacts.[25] Analyses from other studies also support this conclusion.[26]

The mismatch between participation and other impacts also holds true when looking at different groups of welfare recipients within one program. For example, the SWIM program in San Diego increased participation levels the most for the more disadvantaged recipients in the program and increased participation the least for those with the least prior AFDC receipt. Earnings impacts were *largest*, however, for those with the least prior welfare receipt (those with the *smallest* participation impacts). It is most likely that, because the more disadvan-

22. For example, see Farrell, forthcoming, 1999, and Storto et al., forthcoming, 1999.

23. See Riccio and Orenstein, 1996.

24. Freedman et al., forthcoming, 1999.

25. Hamilton, 1995; Hamilton et al., 1997; Scrivener et al., 1998; Farrell, forthcoming, 1999; Storto et al., forthcoming, 1999; and a forthcoming report on the Columbus NEWWS Evaluation site.

26. Riccio and Orenstein, 1996, p. 16.

taged clients spent more time on welfare, they had more opportunities to enter into program-sponsored education, training, or job search activities. The same characteristics that led to longer spells on welfare, however, diminished the potential for large earnings or employment impacts among that group.[27]

The above results do not mean that participation levels do not matter. Again, it is of paramount importance that programs engage people who, in the absence of a special intervention, would not have become involved in employment-related activities. The above results simply illustrate that increasing participation rates by a set amount has not been found to increase job-finding and welfare exits by a corresponding set amount. In addition, the results emphasize the importance of not just participation rates, but also *who* is participating (that is, what segment of the caseload, as illustrated by the SWIM example) as well as *what* people are doing when they participate.

9. The Relationship Between Sanctioning and Participation

As has been discussed, for a program to make a difference — to increase employment and earnings and decrease welfare receipt — it must engage people in program activities who would not otherwise participate in them. Programs can do this by enforcing a participation mandate. The degree to which a program enforces a participation mandate can be viewed as a product of three factors: (1) how wide a cross-section of the welfare caseload is enrolled in a program, (2) how closely a program monitors people's participation, and (3) how swiftly and consistently a program imposes financial sanctions on those who do not participate, and the severity of the sanction that is imposed.

- **Programs with a high level of enforcement produce higher participation rates than do programs with a low level of enforcement.**

A report from the NEWWS Evaluation classifies the 11 programs studied into two categories: programs with high enforcement of the participation mandate and programs with low enforcement. The nine high-enforcement programs aimed to enroll most mandatory people, monitored participation in program activities moderately or intensively, and reinforced the mandatory nature of the program through sanctions (partial grant reductions) and other means, such as positive encouragement. The two low-enforcement programs tended to give preference to those who volunteered for the program, did not strongly communicate the mandatory participation requirements, did not closely monitor participation in program activities, and rarely imposed financial sanctions for nonparticipation.

27. Friedlander and Hamilton, 1993.

As Table 2 shows, on average the two low-enforcement programs produced lower longitudinal participation rates and smaller impacts on participation than did the high-enforcement programs. The high-enforcement programs had an average longitudinal participation rate of 57 percent (using a follow-up period of two years) and increased participation above the level achieved by the control group by 26 percentage points. In contrast, the low-enforcement programs had an average longitudinal participation rate of 45 percent and increased participation by an average of only 10 percentage points.

Table 2

The Relationship Between Enforcement, Sanctioning, and Participation

Program and Category	Sanctioning Rate (%)	Longitudinal Participation Rate (%)	Participation Impact (%)
High enforcement			
High sanctioning			
Grand Rapids LFA	42	69	16
Atlanta HCD	41	61	33
Grand Rapids HCD	38	67	21
Columbus Integrated	36	55	24
Columbus Traditional	35	54	21
Average	*38*	*57*	*23*
Moderate sanctioning			
Portland	21	61	26
Atlanta LFA	19	74	29
Riverside HCD	15	51	40
Riverside LFA	9	44	24
Average	*16*	*58*	*30*
Average of high-enforcement programs	28	57	26
Low enforcement			
Low sanctioning			
Detroit	3	51	9
Oklahoma City	2	39	11
Average	*3*	*45*	*10*

SOURCES: Hamilton et al., 1997; Scrivener et al., 1998; Freedman et al., forthcoming, 1999; Farrell, forthcoming, 1999; and Storto et al., forthcoming, 1999, forthcoming report on the Columbus NEWWS Evaluation site.

The particularly small 10-percentage-point participation impact in the low-enforcement programs is related to the fact, discussed earlier, that some control group members engage in activities on their own. A program without a significant "push" or "pull" will not engage many more people than would have participated anyway. In particular, a program that focuses on enrolling people who volunteer for the program will have a difficult time producing substantial participation impacts.

- **In the context of a "high-enforcement" program, higher sanctioning rates will not necessarily increase participation.**

Sanctions for lack of participation in welfare-to-work programs are not new; they have been used since the early 1980s. By locality, however, sanctioning rates have ranged widely. Some programs in the high-enforcement category sanctioned nonparticipants at very high rates. These programs, however, were no more successful in engaging people in program activities than programs in the high-enforcement category with more moderate sanctioning rates. As the table shows, the programs with the highest sanctioning rates did *not* have the highest participation rates nor the largest participation impacts (in fact, the programs with moderate sanctioning rates did better). As will be shown in section 13, higher rates of sanctioning are not related to higher orientation attendance rates, either.

It is important to note, however, that these pre-TANF programs imposed partial grant reductions and not full-family sanctions. In the Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside NEWWS Evaluation sites, for example, sanctions represented a 16 to 19 percent reduction in a family's monthly welfare grant, depending on the site.[28]

- **The length of sanctions has not been shown to affect eventual participation levels.**

While sanctions have varied in length over the last two decades, they became much longer in the 1990s. In the NEWWS Evaluation sites, the partial grant sanctions were to continue until the sanctioned recipients complied with the participation mandate, with a minimum sanction of three months for the second occurrence of noncompliance and six months for the third (there was no minimum for the first occurrence). Some programs have a specific participation requirement that must be met in order for a sanction to be ended. In the Grand Rapids site, for example, sanctioned people had to participate in an assigned activity for 5 to 10 days without any problems before their offer to cooperate would be accepted and the sanction ended.

In the NEWWS Evaluation sites for which detailed sanction data are available, average sanction length over a two-year follow-up period ranged from 4.0 months to 11.6 months. For example, those who were sanctioned in the Atlanta

28 Hamilton et al. 1997.

LFA program were sanctioned for an average of 6.9 months; those sanctioned in the Grand Rapids LFA program had their grants reduced for an average of 11.6 months. It is notable that the longer sanctions in Grand Rapids did not lead to higher participation rates, as compared with those in Atlanta.[29]

- **Early research suggests that more severe, full-family sanctions do not necessarily lead to higher participation rates.**

The imposition of full-family, as opposed to partial, sanctions is a relatively recent development in mandatory welfare-to-work programs. As a result, little data exist on the effectiveness of such measures for increasing participation. Recent results from a study of Delaware's A Better Chance (ABC) program, however, do not suggest a link between full-family sanctions and increased participation.[30]

Delaware's program has two different types of sanctions: a family responsibility sanction, which is imposed when certain family-related requirements, such as child immunizations, are not met, and a Work and Training sanction, which is imposed for failing to participate in welfare-to-work program activities. The family responsibility sanction consists of an initial $50 penalty, followed by a $50 per month grant reduction until the "responsibility" is met. The Work and Training sanction reduces a family's grant by one-third for two months for the first occurrence of noncompliance and by two-thirds for two more months for a second occurrence. Further occurrences result in an eight-year cessation of welfare cash benefits. (Eligibility for Food Stamps and Medicaid continues during this period.)

Within an 18-month follow-up period, 57 percent of those enrolled in the Delaware program were sanctioned; the majority of the sanctions were in connection with noncompliance with employment and training activities. Over time, the sanction rate has actually increased, suggesting that a strong initial threat against nonparticipation does not deter people from noncompliance. Furthermore, less than one-third of those sanctioned have "cured" their sanctions. Thus, there is no evidence — at least so far — that full-family sanctions, as compared with partial sanctions, increase participation rates. (In addition, note that people under full-family sanctions cannot be counted as a reduction in the welfare caseload and thus do not help lower a state's target participation rate.)

- **People who are more disadvantaged may be more likely to be sanctioned.**

There is evidence that suggests that sanctions are more likely to be imposed on more disadvantaged welfare recipients than on less disadvantaged ones and tend to last longer for the former group. Most likely, this is because the more disadvantaged people remain on welfare longer, giving them more oppor-

29. Hamilton et al., 1997; Scrivener et al., 1998; and a forthcoming report on the Columbus NEWWS Evaluation site.

30. See Fein, 1999.

tunity to fail to comply with a participation mandate and become sanctioned. For example, in the Atlanta, Grand Rapids, Riverside, and Columbus NEWWS Evaluation sites, recipients without a high school diploma or GED were more likely to have a sanction imposed on them than were their credentialed counterparts, and, in most of these programs, sanctions were longer for the former group.[51]

10. The Cost of Participation

The total costs of welfare-to-work programs have ranged widely.[52] Some important factors that can influence costs are spelled out in the list that follows. Participation is relevant to most of these factors. When seeking to increase participation, program administrators must recognize a trade-off: generally, increasing participation increases costs.

Key Factors Affecting Welfare-to-Work Program Costs

- **The number of participants.** Generally, the more people participating in a program, the higher the cost.
- **The average length and intensity of participation.** In general, longer stays in program activities generate higher costs than shorter stays, and participation for more hours per week generates higher costs than less intensive participation.
- **The types of activities in which people participate.** Education and training activities usually cost more than job search activities, but this difference results primarily because education and training activities usually last longer.
- **Participant characteristics.** Parents with very young children tend to incur much higher costs for child care services than parents whose children are older. People with more barriers to work and participation may be more costly to engage in program activities.
- **The extent of participant monitoring and case management.** Closer monitoring of participation in program activities and more in-depth case management generally increase costs.
- **The extent to which support services are made available and the cost of those services.** Support service costs for a program increase

51 Hamilton et al., 1997, and the forthcoming report on the Columbus NEWWS Evaluation site. However, in one site in the NEWWS Evaluation — Portland, Oregon — sanction rates and lengths were similar for graduates and nongraduates (Scrivener et al., 1998).

52 See MDRC's *Cost Analysis Step by Step* (Greenberg and Appenzeller, 1998) for instructions for conducting analyses of the cost of ongoing or proposed employment and training programs.

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when more people receive services and when more expensive services, such as center-based child care rather than in-home care, are used.

- **Management practices (such as client-to-staff ratios), overhead costs, and wage scales.** Generally, lower client-to-staff ratios yield higher program costs. Local rates for costs such as rent, utilities, supplies, and salaries can vary greatly.

How the Federal Law Affects Participation Costs

The requirements in the PRWORA will affect participation costs in a number of ways:

- **Increased base.** The PRWORA eliminated most exemptions from participation, thus increasing the base of people who are expected to participate. To achieve the same participation rates a program met prior to the 1996 law, the program will need to work with more people, because the denominator of the participation ratio will have increased. This change will increase program costs.
- **Higher participation rates.** The 1996 law requires a higher percentage of a state's caseload to participate at the risk of losing a portion of its federal funding. In previous mandatory programs, the participation rate, using a definition similar to that in the 1996 law, was only 5 to 10 percent.[33] Increasing the number of people who participate in activities and use services in order to meet the new rates will increase program costs. Recall, however, that programs also spend time and money on people who do not participate, trying to engage people in program activities, monitoring and enforcing mandates, and imposing sanctions on nonparticipants.
- **Higher hourly participation thresholds.** The PRWORA definition of participation requires more intensive participation in activities than did previous law; generally, single parents must spend at least an average of 25 hours per week during a month in 1999 and 30 hours per week in 2000 to be counted as participating for that month. Two-parent families must spend at least 35 hours per week in activities or work to meet the threshold. Keeping people in activities for this length of time will increase case management and service costs as well as overhead and other administrative costs.
- **More participants who are hard to serve.** It is likely that some of the people whom current welfare-to-work programs must serve will require additional and more costly services than the average person required to participate under previous regulations. The PRWORA eliminates exemp-

33 Hamilton, 1995.

tions for age, infirmities, and transportation difficulties; each of the groups affected by these changes will likely have barriers to participation that the new programs must address, such as additional transportation assistance, special counseling services, or more intensive case management. The additional services and staff attention needed to solve these barriers will likely increase costs.

- **Increased use of support services.** Even among groups who have needs similar to those previously served by welfare-to-work programs, per-person support service costs will increase, because people are required to participate longer. Among the newly mandatory participants, average child care costs are likely to increase, because states may require parents with children of any age to participate; typically, child care for younger children is more expensive to provide than care for older, school-aged children.

Strategies for Balancing Participation with Cost

Though maintaining high overall participation rates and hours of participation in activities are necessary to meet PRWORA participation thresholds and to retain full TANF funding, there are ways to balance the benefits of increasing participation with the increased costs to the program. The following recommendations come from program experience.

✔ **Ensure that resources are spent on active participation.**

Close case monitoring of attendance and progress can ensure that program resources are being spent on a person who is participating consistently. Making quick referrals to other activities is a way to maintain high participation rates.

✔ **Utilize economies of scale.**

Programs that enroll large numbers of participants benefit from economies of scale. Overhead costs, such as rent, utilities, equipment, and administrative staff salaries, are spread across a larger base of participants. Increasing class sizes for job search or education classes can decrease costs per participant. Note, however, that increasing class sizes may also reduce the level of attention students receive and thus lower the quality of service.

✔ **Reduce the length of time people spend in the program.**

By keeping close track of attendance and progress, case managers can ensure that program resources pay for active participation and can reduce the number of months that participants spend in the program. In addition, use of short-term activities reduces the amount of time participants spend in the program.

✔ **Enter into agreements with outside service agencies.**

Other service agencies may be able to provide services more cheaply than the welfare department or may have funds to pay for program activities. The offsetting costs of contract management and oversight, however, must also be considered.

✔ **Limit child care costs and make activity scheduling flexible.**

Child care provided by licensed centers tends to be the most expensive, followed by family day care and then by child care provided by friends or relatives. Some programs counsel participants to seek low-cost child care, taking the position that welfare recipients who are using low-cost care will be able to afford this service on their own after leaving welfare. Other programs counsel participants to use licensed child care centers, believing that such facilities offer higher quality and more reliable care and can therefore provide better support for program participation.

The age of children also matters. Infant child care tends to be the most expensive, followed by toddler care and care for preschool-aged children. Program planners may want to take these differences into account when determining who should participate in programs. Some administrators have found, however, that it is not more expensive to serve parents with young children, because these parents tend to have fewer children and often rely on relatives for child care.

Limiting the number of required hours of participation and maintaining flexibility in scheduling those hours can also reduce child care costs. For example, the San Diego SWIM program, which served only parents with school-aged children, referred participants to activities that coincided with their children's school hours. Parents then needed only some before-school, after-school, backup, and summer care, so costs were noticeably reduced.

Weighing Costs and Benefits

It is important to note that costs are only part of the fiscal story; welfare-to-work programs can bring a return on the investment when people leave the program for work. For example, programs often reduce public spending by lowering welfare receipt and raise revenues by increasing the number of working people who pay taxes. Increasing participation will likely cost more but may also generate more savings. The savings from reduced welfare and increased revenue may or may not outweigh the initial investment.

III.

Getting People in the Door: Strategies to Increase the Number Who Begin the Program

Getting people started in a welfare-to-work program is the first step toward reaching participation goals. It is worth paying special attention to this step, because it is generally the point at which programs experience the most fall-off in participation. Between a quarter and a third of welfare recipients required to participate in welfare-to-work programs never even get to the first activity (usually an orientation session or a meeting with a case manager). While attending an orientation may not in itself count as participating (for example, it is not included in the federal rates), it serves as the gateway for future participation.

Many factors influence whether and how quickly programs get welfare recipients in the door. These factors include whether there are waiting lists for program orientation slots, the efficiency of procedures for identifying persons who are required to participate in program activities and referring them to the program, and the extent to which welfare recipients perceive that they can be sanctioned if they fail to attend a scheduled orientation without "good cause." Following a discussion of typical orientation attendance rates and the reasons people do not attend, this part of the guide suggests strategies for increasing the number of people who take the first step in welfare-to-work programs.

11. Typical Show-Up Rates and Why They Are Not Higher

What Proportion of Those Referred to Programs Typically Make It in the Door?

Most welfare-to-work programs begin by assigning welfare recipients to attend an orientation session. In some programs, the first activity may instead be an assessment interview or a one-on-one meeting with a case manager. The orientation or initial meeting acts as a gateway to the program; it is the first activity, and one that must be completed in order for the recipient to be considered enrolled in the program and offered program services. Program staff and administrators report that typically less than half of those referred to the program attend their first scheduled orientation.[1] In most programs that MDRC has studied, between two-thirds and three-fourths of those scheduled for orientation *eventually* attended a session.[2]

These rates, however, vary from office to office within programs. For example, across all offices in a study of the California GAIN program, an average of 71 percent of those referred eventually attended orientation, but rates ranged

1. Riccio et al., 1989.

2. For example, in California's GAIN program, 71 percent of those referred to orientation attended a session within 6 months of referral (Riccio et al., 1989); in Florida's Project Independence, 77 percent attended within 12 months of referral (Kemple and Haimson, 1994); in the Grand Rapids JOBS program, 65 percent attended; and in Riverside's JOBS program, 63 percent attended (Knab et al., forthcoming).

from 57 to 97 percent from one office to another. These differences suggest that different procedures for getting people in the door, as well as underlying caseload characteristics and employment and welfare dynamics (discussed below), can make a difference in attendance rates.

The eventual orientation attendance rates, however, belie the importance of getting people to orientation sessions quickly. For example, in programs studied in Grand Rapids and Riverside, about two-thirds of those scheduled for an orientation eventually attended one, but in a typical month many people were waiting to be oriented to the program. In any given month, only approximately 51 percent of those required to be program participants in Grand Rapids had already attended a program orientation and thus were available for assignment to a program activity; this figure was 72 percent in Riverside.[3]

Why Do Some People Never Begin the Program?

In terms of increasing participation, some of the reasons that people do not enroll in welfare-to-work programs are not of particular concern.

- **Many people who do not attend orientation have had their welfare applications denied.** Some people are referred to a welfare-to-work program when they apply for welfare. If they later are not approved to receive welfare, they are no longer required to attend the program.
- **Some leave the welfare rolls shortly after being referred to programs.** Some people find a job and leave welfare; others leave the rolls to avoid the participation mandate; and others leave welfare for other reasons, such as marriage or moving out of the county or state.
- **Others become exempt from participation requirements.** Circumstances can change after a person is referred to the program, with the result that the person is no longer mandatory for the program. For example, some programs exempt from participation requirements anyone who is seriously ill. A person could become ill shortly after referral to the program and become exempt before attending.

In other words, by the time they are expected to participate, some people may not be receiving cash assistance or may not be considered mandatory and would not be counted in the denominator of the participation rate. Indeed, many of these people, particularly those who quickly find jobs, are furthering other, nonparticipation goals of programs.

Other reasons for not beginning a program are of more concern:

- **Some recipients do not have "good cause" for not attending orientations and may be sanctioned for their lack of cooperation.** Some people remain on welfare and remain mandatory for the program

3. Hamilton, 1995.

but do not attend orientation. Case managers typically explore the reasons for not attending; if they determine that a person did not have "good cause" as defined by the program, they often impose financial penalties (sanctions).

- **Some "fall through the cracks."** Some people become lost in the bureaucratic maze as caseworkers try to keep track of hundreds of schedulings and reschedulings. These people often are never sanctioned for their nonparticipation.[4]

Trade-Offs in Trying to Increase Program Entrance Rates

As with all policy decisions, there are trade-offs involved in trying to increase the number of people who begin a welfare-to-work program. Program administrators should consider the following:

- **Getting people in the door is time-consuming and expensive.**

Getting welfare recipients to enroll in a welfare-to-work program is a staff-intensive and therefore expensive undertaking. In fact, more staff contacts — such as letters, phone calls, and home visits — typically are made with welfare recipients who do not immediately comply with the orientation attendance requirement than with those who do. Program staff in the Grand Rapids, Riverside, and Atlanta programs in the NEWWS Evaluation made an average of five contacts with clients who *did not* attend orientation within six months of being scheduled for a session, compared with an average of three contacts with clients who *did* attend orientations within this same period.[5]

- **Many people leave welfare on their own.**

Many welfare recipients get jobs or leave welfare on their own for other reasons, and new welfare applicants are especially likely to do so. Therefore, focusing on quickly engaging all new recipients in employment-related activities will likely spend resources on individuals who would have left assistance without participating.

- **Time limits and participation requirements amplify the need to increase the number who get through the door quickly, despite the potential cost.**

Once a person starts receiving TANF assistance, her welfare "clock is ticking." It is therefore important to orient her quickly to the program's services and penalties and then place her in a program activity. Not only is she thus given maximum exposure to presumably beneficial program services but she is then counted as a "participant" in the TANF rates (if the activity and hours meet the standards). People who are receiving TANF assistance but have not begun a

4. Hamilton et al., 1997; Hamilton and Brock, 1994; Knab et al., forthcoming.

5. Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

welfare-to-work program are counted in the denominator of the participation rate but do not increase the numerator of the rate.

12. Strategies to Improve Program Outreach

This section describes strategies that programs can use to improve their outreach efforts to potential participants. A strong outreach effort ensures that welfare recipients are aware of both what is expected of them and the opportunities presented by program participation.

Lesson from the Research

✔ **Identify all potential participants.**

The first step in referring someone to a program orientation session or other official program entry point is determining that she *should* be referred. In some states, all adults receiving any TANF assistance are required to participate. In other states, some people are exempt from the program (such as parents with very young children), and determinations must be made about who should be referred.

Some programs have relied on individual staff members to identify correctly those who are mandatory. Others have automated the process, using a computer system to identify mandatory individuals automatically on the basis of information entered by program staff. As long as relevant information is correctly entered into the system, automated systems are generally less likely to overlook people who should be defined as mandatory.

Additional steps can be taken to improve the process. One program in the NEWWS Evaluation, Grand Rapids, found that its process for identifying who was required to participate in welfare-to-work activities was insufficient. The program therefore employed a "case finder," who periodically reviewed the status of welfare recipients to determine whether in fact they should be designated as mandatory program participants and scheduled for program orientations.[6] While this was very time-consuming and expensive, it helped the program overcome the shortcomings of its automated system.

Recommendations from Program Experience[7]

✔ **Use a variety of outreach methods.**

Many programs rely on only one or two methods to reach out to potential participants, usually having income maintenance workers tell welfare recipi-

6 Hamilton et al., 1997

7 Some of the recommendations in this section are adapted from materials by Cygnet Associates, a workforce development consulting firm. For more information, see their Web site at www.cygnetassociates.com.

ents about the program and mailing a letter to those required to participate. These are two of the easiest and most effective outreach methods, but programs having difficulty recruiting participants may want to supplement these with other strategies. The box below describes some procedures that programs have used, drawing from two sites in the NEWWS Evaluation that made a concerted effort to bring people into the program.

The New Hope program in Milwaukee is an example of a program that successfully used multiple outreach methods.[8] New Hope was a voluntary program that provided an income supplement, subsidized child care, and affordable health insurance to low-income workers and offered the opportunity for paid community service jobs to those who could not find a job on their own. First, the program sent mailings to residents in the two target neighborhoods who were likely to be eligible, including those receiving public assis-

8 Brock et al., 1997.

Examples of Procedures Used to Get Participants in the Door

The Grand Rapids and Riverside JOBS programs illustrate the various types of procedures that can be used to get people in the door of mandatory welfare-to-work programs. The orientation show-up rates in the programs were virtually identical: 65 percent in Grand Rapids and 63 percent in Riverside.

Letters

Both programs sent letters to people informing them they were required to attend a program orientation and scheduling them for an initial orientation appointment. These letters indicated that the JOBS program provided employment and training activities for which they might be eligible and notified them that they might lose a portion or all of their AFDC grant (that is, experience a financial sanction) if they failed to attend the orientation session.

Home Visits

Grand Rapids staff made home visits to welfare recipients after they were sent an orientation scheduling notice but before they were supposed to attend the orientation, to explain the purpose of the orientation and program more clearly, urge people to show up, and emphasize that there were negative consequences if they did not show up.

Follow-Up

Both sites followed up repeatedly with people who did not attend orientation, though Grand Rapids was more persistent. In Grand Rapids, people who eventually showed up at an orientation were contacted by staff an average of five times prior to their attendance, while in Riverside, those who eventually attended were contacted an average of three times. Similarly, Grand Rapids staff contacted those who never attended an orientation an average of eight times, compared with five times by staff in Riverside.

SOURCE: Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

tance. New Hope also conducted extensive community outreach to local social service organizations, churches, and other community groups, to get their help in getting the word out about the program. While no single contact generated large numbers of referrals, repeated contacts with many organizations increased awareness of New Hope's presence and led to a steady inflow of potential applicants.

New Hope also took additional steps to bring in participants. They hired staff to distribute flyers in public spaces, such as bus stops and libraries, tapped local media to publicize the program, and set up a 24-hour hotline and voicemail system so that people could have their questions about the program answered at any time. Finally, New Hope staff learned that the best spokespersons for the project were program participants, and they began offering $5.00 gift certificates to current participants for bringing in a friend.

✔ **Be upbeat and "sell" the program.**

As was noted earlier, one office of California's GAIN program achieved a 97 percent orientation attendance rate. One notable feature of that program was that almost all (94 percent) income maintenance staff agreed that they "should put much effort" into making potential participants enthusiastic about the program, twice as many as in any other GAIN program studied.[9]

One way to begin is to think about welfare-to-work outreach efforts as a marketing campaign. That is, the more you can sell the idea that participation is important and can be beneficial, the more potential participants will be likely to enroll. To do this, it is important that program staff believe that the program can help welfare recipients. When staff are enthusiastic about the program, that belief comes across to potential participants.

Another way to generate excitement is to focus on the *outcomes* the program can help welfare recipients achieve rather than the *process* they must go through. For example, instead of simply telling welfare recipients that they need to attend an orientation, sign a personal development plan, or make a given number of job contacts, talk about how working will improve their situation, whether by increasing their family income or by raising self-esteem. Programs have been successful by stressing the benefits of having extra money around back-to-school time or the holidays, the chance to be free of welfare's rules and oversight, and even the opportunity to socialize with other adults. Relating success stories of former participants who are now working can also help generate enthusiasm and make the marketing effort more real.

✔ **Take responsibility for outreach.**

Welfare-to-work programs that are operated by workforce agencies and community-based organizations often rely on referrals from the welfare agency to enroll participants. The welfare agency identifies those required or eligible to participate and directs them to register at the welfare-to-work program. The

9 These data are from a survey completed by staff in all GAIN offices studied. (See Riccio et al., 1989.)

welfare-to-work program is then left waiting for potential participants to show up at the door.

Programs relying on referrals have two frequent complaints. First, they sometimes find that identifying and referring participants is not a priority for welfare agency staff, given their heavy workloads and the fact that a separate agency is responsible for welfare-to-work activities. Second, programs often find that even when the welfare agency is referring potential participants, only a small percentage of referrals follow through.

Programs can address these problems by taking responsibility for outreach. If not enough recipients are being referred, for example, offer to place a staff person at the welfare agency to help identify potential participants, give out information, and schedule intake appointments. If show-up rates are low, ask the welfare agency to provide a list of all those referred so that you can conduct follow-up activities, such as mailing additional information and repeating the participation message.

✔ **Develop materials that are understandable to people with low literacy levels.**

Most programs rely on a written message to inform potential participants of their responsibility to register. Often, this is in the form of a letter explaining that they are required to attend and either scheduling them for an orientation or providing a number that they must call to schedule an appointment. The letter frequently contains complicated and bureaucratic language.

In preparing outreach materials, it is important to remember that many welfare recipients have low reading levels or speak a first language other than English. Keeping the language simple not only increases the chances that these potential participants can read and understand the materials but also makes the information clearer for any reader. The more that potential participants understand what is expected of them, the more likely they are to follow through.

Keep materials easy to read by limiting sentences to no more than 10 words, avoiding words with more than two or three syllables, using an active voice, and avoiding acronyms and welfare department jargon.

✔ **Keep materials simple, direct, and visually engaging.**

A common problem with outreach materials is that they try to squeeze every bit of information about the program onto a one- or two-sided page. Rather than clarifying, this level of detail actually makes the materials more confusing. Materials will be more engaging — and also more readable — if they are limited to one page and use a type face of 14 points or larger. Tell readers simply and directly what you want them to do and how to do it. If materials must include a lot of details or legal language, put it at the end. Remember that your outreach material does not need to tell people every detail about the welfare-to-work program; it just needs to say enough to get potential participants to follow up.

The staff of the New Hope project described earlier learned from experience that the materials they distributed had to be simple and direct in order to get their message across. The program had many complicated elements, including multiple components and eligibility rules. With help from a marketing team, they modified their flyers and posters to emphasize the benefits of the program and grab people's attention. The objective of the new materials was to provide enough of a "hook" so that people would want to call the program office for more information. An example of a revised New Hope brochure can be found on page 44.

Outreach materials should also be visually engaging. An eye-catching design will help the material stand out from all the other correspondence people receive and may make potential participants more eager to enroll. Design materials as flyers or posters rather than as letters, or attach an appealing flyer to a letter. Use techniques such as large and attention-grabbing headlines, white space, drawings or photographs, and multiple type faces and sizes. The New Hope brochure makes effective use of bold contrast and the headline "Work / Health care / Child care / Extra money." Test the material by asking whether it would grab your attention and make you want to attend.

✔ **Repeat the message over and over again.**

Welfare recipients receive a great deal of information from their caseworkers and the welfare system about their benefits, eligibility, requirements, and available services. New welfare applicants, in particular, have to absorb a lot of information at once. As a result, the message about participation in welfare-to-work activities may get lost.

Many programs, however, rely on *one* letter to recruit participants. Others first mail program information and then follow up with a phone call to explain it further and schedule an intake appointment. Experience suggests that the more often the message is repeated, the more likely potential participants are to hear the message and follow through.

An advertising rule of thumb suggests that people need to hear a message as many as 15 times before the message sinks in and they are ready to act on it. Programs should therefore consider multiple methods and waves of outreach, including mailing materials, making telephone contacts, communicating information at all meetings with case managers and other program staff, and posting information at welfare offices, supermarkets, and other places where potential participants are likely to be. Another rule of thumb suggests that when staff are sick and tired of repeating the message, potential participants are probably just beginning to hear it.

✔ **Be creative.**

Because every place is different, some programs may find that they face unique challenges to getting people in the door. One way to approach the

The New Hope Project

Revised Recruitment Brochure

Who Is Eligible?

NEW HOPE can help you if you:

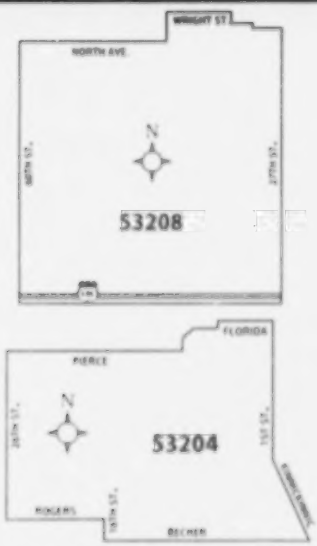
- live in the 53204 or 53208 zip code areas
- are at least 18 years old
- are able to work full-time

You can put NEW HOPE in your life if you are:

- employed or unemployed
- receiving public assistance or not receiving public assistance
- single or married
- male or female
- any family size or without children

In other words, no matter who you are, there may be NEW HOPE for you.

Target Areas



The NEW HOPE Project, Inc. is a pilot program which can serve a limited number of participants. Some income guidelines apply.

IF YOU NEED HELP GETTING...

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Extra money

...put
NEW HOPE
in your life!

For information call the NEW HOPE Hotline

937-3131

Program information is also available in Spanish, Hmong and Lao

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problem is to be willing to try new things and test out different solutions. The New Hope project used a variety of innovative recruitment methods, such as a 24-hour hotline and gift certificates for current participants who brought in a friend, to meet the unique challenges of their complicated, neighborhood-specific, voluntary program.

Let program staff brainstorm for outreach ideas. Ask participants what brought them in. Survey nonparticipants to find out why they did not attend. When you develop ideas, test them on a small scale. Track how well they work, and be prepared to drop those that are not successful and to expand those that are. Another idea is to institute some friendly competition among staff or offices to see who can bring in the most participants. Provide a prize for the most successful group and have them share their techniques with others.

13. Strategies to Improve Intake and Follow-Up

In addition to informing people about the program, there are other things programs can do to increase the number of people who enroll. This section describes program strategies relating to intake and follow-up that research and program experience have shown to be effective in increasing the number of potential participants who begin the program.

Lessons from the Research

✔ **Track attendance at orientation.**

In order to follow up with individuals who do not participate, it is necessary to be *aware* of who does and does not attend an orientation or other first activity. It is also important that this information be obtained as quickly as possible after the event so that prompt follow-up can occur. Programs use different ways of keeping track of attendance. In the GAIN program in Riverside, staff in the reception area had a list of those who were expected to attend the orientation each day. As they arrived, their names were checked off. Another method is to focus on building relationships and efficient communication channels between staff who are responsible for referring potential participants and those responsible for conducting the orientation and the welfare-to-work program intake. In the GAIN office that succeeded in getting 97 percent of people in the door, income maintenance and welfare-to-work program staff had notably better relations than did staff in the other counties. These relationships allowed for quick communication of information, including orientation attendance.[10]

10 Riccio et al., 1989.

✔ **Follow up immediately with people who do not initially attend.**

Quick follow-up accomplishes several things. First, it makes it less likely that recipients who fail to participate will be forgotten by the welfare-to-work program. Second, it reinforces the participation mandate by showing that the program will track people's actions and enforce expectations. Third, it enables staff to learn about any legitimate reasons for nonparticipation and assist welfare recipients in addressing those issues.

Programs using a system of *integrated case management* may be able to follow up more extensively. In this system, one staff member is responsible for both the income maintenance role (determining eligibility and processing benefits) and the employment role (assigning participants to welfare-to-work activities and monitoring their progress). This system differs from *traditional case management*, in which separate staff members perform these distinct roles. The integrated case management approach tested in Columbus, Ohio, described in the box on page 47, was more effective at getting people in the door of the welfare-to-work program than the traditional approach. (Also note, however, that the success of integrated case management in Columbus depended upon other program facets, described in the box.)

Data from the Columbus programs indicated that follow-up for those who did not attend orientations was done more thoroughly and frequently by integrated case managers than by traditional case managers.[11] In fact, traditional case managers were much more likely than integrated staff *never* to contact people who did not attend a scheduled orientation.[12]

Similarly, in the California GAIN evaluation, the county with the lowest orientation show-up rate (57 percent in six months) had no contact with 68 percent of those who did not show up to a scheduled orientation (compared with "no contact" rates of only 20 and 30 percent in two comparison counties).[13]

✔ **Be clear about the consequences of not following through.**

Welfare-to-work program staff have two tools available to encourage initial participation: promoting the positive opportunities presented by the program and warning of the negative consequences of failing to enroll. In some programs, staff prefer to focus on the positive aspects when recruiting participants. Experience suggests that it is also important to communicate the negative consequences.

11. In the Columbus program, people were identified as required to participate in the program during application or redetermination for their welfare benefits. Once someone was identified as "mandatory," it was up to the employment worker in the traditional program or the integrated worker in the integrated program to send out a letter scheduling that person for a specific orientation session and to follow up on attendance.

12. According to unpublished NEWWS Evaluation data, integrated case managers had an average of three contacts with "no-shows," compared with two for traditional case managers. Sixteen percent of traditional case managers did not contact those who did not attend an orientation, compared with 5 percent of integrated case managers.

13. Riccio et al., 1989.

Lessons from Two Case Management Approaches

The case management role can be structured in two ways. Traditional case management requires welfare recipients to interact with two different staff members: an eligibility worker, who processes welfare benefits, and an employment worker, who assigns participants to welfare-to-work activities and monitors their progress. In integrated case management, both the eligibility and employment program roles are handled by one worker.

Evidence from the NEWWS Evaluation shows that integrated case management can be more effective at getting people in the door. For the evaluation, Columbus, Ohio, operated two programs testing these different approaches to case management. In the traditional program, only 50 percent of those referred attended a JOBS orientation within six months of referral; in the integrated program, 81 percent attended orientation.

The differences in rates probably reflect several of the points made in this section: integrated workers were more likely to know about, and address, family issues that might impede entry into the program; they were able to do scheduling and follow-up more quickly because they avoided the communication problems that staff face in a traditional approach; and they could more effectively communicate the participation mandate because they were responsible for imposing financial sanctions.

Despite these findings, however, integrated case management may not be the best approach for all programs to take. Integrated case management was operated under very good conditions in Columbus, and without these conditions, the approach may be no more effective than the traditional approach, and possibly less effective. First, caseloads were small enough to allow staff to spend ample time on both eligibility and employment service tasks.

Second, integrated staff in Columbus had a high degree of administrative support, including a sophisticated automated case record system, a child care referral unit, and a clerical unit that tracked attendance. Without these supports, staff could have found their work to be overwhelming. Third, administrators in Columbus carefully defined the role of the integrated case manager as one that emphasized both eligibility functions and employment service functions, with the goal of helping people become economically self-sufficient. Not clearly defining the role can lead to the eligibility role's becoming dominant and can confuse and overwhelm staff.

Another program, in Oklahoma City, also used integrated case management, but it did not operate under these same favorable conditions. Participation rates were quite low, and case managers reported that because they had too many people to work with, they tended to focus on the eligibility functions of their jobs at the expense of the employment service functions.

SOURCES: Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data; Storto et al., forthcoming, 1999; Brock and Harknett, 1998.

One difficulty staff often report is that welfare recipients may not believe that the welfare agency will follow through and reduce their grant for nonparticipation. Programs need to find ways to make the threat of sanctions both clear and believable. Some programs report that over time, as some people get sanctioned, the information spreads by word of mouth and other welfare recipients come to believe that they must participate.

Integrated case managers may have an easier time communicating the sanction message. The Columbus results suggest that welfare recipients took the requirement to attend program orientations more seriously when the directive was issued by integrated case managers, as opposed to traditional case managers. The integrated case managers had direct control over welfare grants and could impose a financial sanction themselves, rather than relying on a separate worker.

✔ **Do not rely solely on sanctions to increase show-up rates.**

Some programs rely heavily on the threat of sanctions to bring in participants. While it is important to communicate the consequences of nonparticipation, this should not be the only program strategy for encouraging participation. Staff often report that they send intent-to-sanction notices to a large proportion of their caseload; most potential participants then comply, and few actually end up being sanctioned. In other cases, however, staff report that many welfare recipients choose to accept the sanction and remain noncompliant. While the threat of sanctions helps to enforce a reciprocal obligation among welfare recipients, there is no research evidence that higher rates of actual sanctioning for failure to attend orientation produce higher orientation show-up rates. (See section 9 for more on the relationship between sanctioning and participation.)

Some programs impose full-family sanctions for noncompliance with program requirements. This more dramatic penalty may prove to be more effective in spurring people to enter the program, but this has not yet been systematically studied. (See section 15 for discussion of the effects of sanctions on post-orientation program participation.)

Recommendations from Program Experience

✔ **Schedule people for their initial appointment as quickly as possible.**

Whatever the first welfare-to-work program activity, whether an orientation, an assessment, or a case management meeting, delays in its scheduling can contribute to nonattendance. Information communicated to potential participants may be forgotten, and any sense of urgency or excitement generated may be lost. Delay can also weaken the force of the participation message, creating the impression that the program is not an important component of the welfare system. Finally, as time passes, people are more likely to get "lost in the cracks" of welfare client tracking procedures.

✔ **Follow up quickly.**

Once an individual has missed a scheduled appointment, staff should quickly make another attempt to engage her. In the Riverside program described earlier, in which reception area staff tracked orientation attendance, as soon as the orientation session began those same staff began making calls to the no-shows to ask why they did not attend and to reschedule them for the next session.

Another way to promote quick follow-up is to make recruitment a formal staff responsibility. For example, while many programs assign participants to a case manager only after they have attended an orientation and enrolled in the program, others make case management assignments *before* recipients attend. It then becomes part of the case manager's job to bring the participant in. While this approach encourages active follow-up, administrators need to recognize that it takes time and adjust workloads accordingly.

✔ **Make sure needed supports are in place.**

Assessment of the need for support services generally takes place during the orientation or the first meeting between the participant and the case manager. But some support services are needed simply for welfare recipients to show up at that first scheduled session. Some programs offer on-site child care or offer to reimburse child care and transportation expenses for getting to the orientation. One office operating the GAIN program had a separate outreach unit of staff who telephoned or visited people before their scheduled orientations. In these encounters staff helped people solve transportation or child care problems. This was the office, noted earlier, that succeeded in getting 97 percent of those it referred to GAIN to attend an orientation.

The ability to meet support service needs early on may be another reason for the success of integrated case management at increasing initial participation. Given their dual roles, integrated case managers were more likely to know about, and address, family issues that might impede entry into the program.

IV.

Keeping People In: Strategies to Increase Ongoing Participation

Once people get in the door of a welfare-to-work program, staff need to engage them in specific employment-focused activities and keep them involved until they have found a job or left welfare; many programs also provide postemployment services. This part of the guide begins with a discussion of the effect on participation of various case management practices. The sections that follow it offer guidance on monitoring participation and enforcing the participation mandate, motivating participants, reducing periods of inactivity, and meeting support service needs.

14. Case Management Practices and Participation

Case managers are the welfare-to-work program staff most directly responsible for retaining participants once they have enrolled in the program. The case manager's role is generally to work with participants in the development of employment plans, to refer participants to appropriate activities and services, and to monitor and enforce program participation. The present section draws from the research to describe how different case management practices affect participation.

- **Case management tasks that promote participation are very time-consuming and therefore expensive.**

Much of the work of promoting ongoing program participation is done by case managers. Tasks include monitoring and tracking attendance in activities, dealing with client nonparticipation, and arranging support services. A study of the SWIM program in San Diego included an intensive examination of staff time use and found that two-thirds of professional staff time connected with the program was spent on these types of tasks.[1] In the 11 programs studied as part of the NEWWS Evaluation, staff reported that monitoring attendance was one of their most time-consuming tasks. Many staff members also reported that arranging support services and dealing with noncompliance were very time-consuming.[2]

- **While there is likely a threshold caseload size above which staff are unable to be effective, no direct relationship between caseload size and participation has been found.**

Program operators and case managers often speak of the difficulties of large caseloads. Having too many cases to deal with can result in not working closely with any of them or focusing on a subgroup — either those most likely to succeed or those who need the most help (the "squeaky wheels"). When caseloads

1. Hamilton, 1988.
2. Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

are manageable, however, reductions in caseload size do not appear to be correlated with increased longitudinal participation rates. In a special experiment conducted as part of the California GAIN evaluation, some case managers were given caseloads half the size of other case managers. Those with smaller caseloads did not elicit more participation than did staff with larger caseloads.[3]

- **Integrated case management can increase ongoing program participation.**

As was discussed in section 13, programs using an integrated case management model can achieve higher rates of attendance at initial program activities such as orientations. Results from the Columbus site in the NEWWS Evaluation suggest that the integrated approach can also lead to higher rates of participation in activities following orientation. Of those who attended orientation in the Columbus program, 64 percent of those with integrated case managers later participated, compared with 54 percent of those with traditional case managers.[4] When considering whether to adopt an integrated case management structure, however, remember the cautions noted in section 13.

- **No particular model of traditional case management has been found to affect participation rates.**

Traditional case management can be operated in various ways. In the most common arrangement, welfare recipients have one employment program worker who assigns them to activities, monitors their progress, and supports them throughout their tenure in a program. Alternatively, some programs refer participants from one set of employment services staff to another as they move through the program. Specialized staff may be responsible for intake, assessment, job search, or job placement. Still other programs set up specialized units to monitor participation.

Specialization of these types can both support and disrupt efforts to promote participation. On the one hand, staff responsible for just one area (for example, work experience) may be able to forge stronger relations with providers (in this case, employers or supervisors) and therefore more effectively monitor participation and intervene if problems arise. On the other hand, whenever a person switches from one case manager to another (for example, if she moves from work experience to job search), she risks falling through the cracks.

To date, there is no clear evidence that, within sites using a traditional case management structure, the model in which one case manager works continuously with an individual promotes higher or lower participation rates than the model in which people move from one case manager to another.

3. Unpublished MDRC analysis of GAIN participation data.

4. See the forthcoming report on the Columbus NEWWS Evaluation site. Note that these participation statistics are based on welfare case file data. Client survey data, which capture activities that may have occurred during the program or after people left welfare and are subject to recall problems, show a narrower participation differential between the two groups.

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- **Participation rates do not seem to be affected by whether employment activities and services are provided by the welfare agency or by outside agencies.**

Welfare-to-work programs take a variety of approaches to setting up program activities. For example, some programs operate job search activities within the welfare department, while others work with a subcontractor who provides these services. Most programs use education and training classes already existing in the community, but some programs provide additional funding to community providers to enhance their classes or to offer specialized classes for welfare recipients. When activities are provided outside the welfare agency, the service provider assumes some responsibility for monitoring participation and reporting back to case managers.

Available research does not suggest a relationship between these approaches and participation rates. Staff find, however, that monitoring participation is usually easier when activities are operated by welfare department staff.

- **While fostering good relationships between case managers and welfare recipients may be desirable for many reasons, studies do not indicate that a more personalized relationship will lead to higher participation rates.**

Program philosophies can affect relationships between case managers and welfare recipients. For example, some administrators and staff adopt the view that recipients will participate at higher rates and achieve better outcomes if staff get to know them in depth, work with them to remove any personal barriers to participation, and encourage them to succeed. Others may consider such efforts to be costly, unproductive, or a distraction from the more central functions of enrolling people in activities and monitoring participation. While it is possible that a more personalized relationship will lead to higher participation rates, studies show no evidence that it does. For example, in the NEWWS Evaluation, field researchers ranked the degree of "personalized attention" in the 11 programs studied. Programs with more personalized attention did not have consistently higher participation rates than programs with less personalized attention.[5]

- **There is no clear relationship between the provision of counseling or other human services and participation.**

In the NEWWS Evaluation, staff were asked what percentage of their caseload they thought needed various human service supports and what percentage of their caseload they had referred. Across the seven sites, staff reported that between 13 and 24 percent needed counseling or other mental health services and between 10 and 25 percent needed alcohol or drug abuse counseling. They also reported that they had referred between 4 and 18 percent to counseling or

5 Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

other mental health services and between 4 and 14 percent to alcohol or drug abuse counseling.[6] There is no consistent relationship between the rates of referral to these human services and participation. This does not mean, however, that within a site the use of human services would not affect participation.

As has been discussed earlier in this guide, the 1996 federal welfare law eliminates most exemptions from participation requirements. As welfare recipients who were previously exempt are enrolled into welfare-to-work programs, staff can expect to encounter more people with barriers such as mental health problems or substance abuse problems, who are harder to serve and may need counseling or other services. (See Part V of this guide for more information and suggestions on working with the hard to serve.) Requiring people to participate in a human service activity, such as counseling, could engage more people in the program, but these human service activities do not count as participation under the PRWORA.

15. Monitoring Participation and Enforcing the Mandate

This section provides advice for programs on how to monitor participation effectively and enforce the participation mandate. For programs that require welfare recipients to participate as a condition of receiving benefits, enforcement of that mandate is important for increasing participation beyond the level at which people would voluntarily engage in employment-related activities.

Monitoring is important for programs both with and without a participation mandate. Without sufficient monitoring, program staff may not know if a participant fails to follow through with assigned activities, drops out of activities, or stops working. Staff are then unable to quickly follow up to bring her back into the program, provide any needed assistance, or, in mandatory programs, implement financial sanctions when warranted.

Lessons from the Research

✔ **Monitor participation in program activities moderately or intensively.**

Participation monitoring encompasses efforts to make sure that people show up for their assigned activities, attend regularly, and make satisfactory progress. Of the 11 programs studied in the NEWWS Evaluation, those that monitored participation in program activities either moderately or intensively had greater participation impacts than those with low levels of monitoring (see section 9 for details).

The level and type of participation monitoring in a program is affected by many factors, such as staff workload demands, the quality of the automated

6. Petrie and Butler 1997.

systems available to aid in monitoring, the priority placed on participation monitoring within a program, the linkages between welfare-to-work program staff and service providers, and the linkages between program staff and eligibility staff. All these factors are discussed in this section.

✔ **Ensure that staff have time to monitor participation.**

Participation monitoring is very time-consuming. One way to reduce professional time spent on this task is to employ nonprofessional staff to assist with it. In the SWIM program, clerks gradually took over more and more of the work of tracking, monitoring attendance, and verifying and monitoring part-time employment. Another option is to reduce the other responsibilities of case managers. Case management workloads can be reduced by automating some tasks, providing additional clerical support, or specializing some functions, such as facilitating child care arrangements. Finally, some programs ask participants to assist in this task. In a program in Grand Rapids, for example, which aimed to upgrade welfare recipients' basic education skills so that they would qualify for entry into vocational skills training programs, attendance records were maintained on-line. Students were required to attend classes for 20 hours per week, and they could log on to a computer while in class to check on how close they were to meeting this requirement each week.[7]

✔ **Invest in well-designed automated tracking systems.**

Automated client tracking systems can aid in monitoring participation and significantly cut down on the amount of program staff time needed for this activity. It is essential that the automated system be interactive and able to provide timely, "tailored" assistance to program staff in tracking participants' activities, as opposed to serving primarily as a data depository.[8] The system should be able to tell staff where participants are at any point, track dates and deadlines, and alert them to participation junctures, such as when an assigned activity is scheduled to end. A system that allows eligibility and employment staff to share information can also help facilitate communication around participation issues.

For example, Ohio uses the CRIS-E system, which combines welfare-to-work program information with welfare eligibility data. Each caseworker has his or her own terminal and on-line access to the system, and the intent (largely realized) is to have "paperless" case files. A certain amount of client history is retained on the system, enabling caseworkers to review clients' past participation experiences. See the box on page 57 for more details about this system.

Also desirable for automated systems is the capability to link up with contracted service providers. If a link between the provider's information and the welfare department's automated tracking system can be established, providers

7. Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

8. See Nathan and Gais, 1999, pp. 52-63, for a discussion of the shortcomings of current welfare information systems in 18 states.

Features of CRIS-E, Ohio's Automated Tracking System

Ohio's CRIS-E system is a statewide network of communication data lines that connects every individual County Department of Human Services user with the state's central computer system. CRIS-E both connects workers to each other and connects individual workers to extensive databases of client characteristics, case histories, and benefit information. A central feature of Ohio's system is the wide array of tasks it performs and the extensive amount of client data that it tracks. It simultaneously consolidates data associated with eligibility determination, case maintenance, financial information, support services, and clients' participation in program activities.

The following are some of the tasks that CRIS-E performs:

- **Caseload management support.** CRIS-E processes client notices and monitors changes in state code and eligibility criteria. CRIS-E handles data exchange, client scheduling, benefit issuance, benefit reconciliation, and benefit recovery. An automated "alert" system notifies workers of situations requiring immediate action, such as the termination of benefits (which obviously affects welfare-to-work program participation) or overdue reapplications. An interactive interviewing mode allows interviewers to use the terminal and simultaneously interview the client, thus minimizing human error in recording information from client interviews.
- **Maintains and consolidates extensive information on clients' participation in program activities.** CRIS-E tracks a client's compliance with an employability plan, dates for planned assessment and reassessment, assignment to program activities, site numbers, employers, the beginning and ending dates for the client's participation in each program or work-related activity, attendance record, work schedule, how frequently she is working or participating fewer hours than she is scheduled for, and whether she has good cause for absences.
- **Records detailed information on a client's case history.** CRIS-E records a client's full participation, employment, and benefit history, as well as maintaining a running record of the case manager's rationale for placing the client in specific activities. Furthermore, CRIS-E keeps a running record of case managers' comments and explanations for a client's participation and changes in a client's status. Finally, the system documents the flow of communication between client and case manager, including letters, phone calls, and visits.

SOURCE: Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

can send attendance data electronically to the welfare department, and program case managers can promptly evaluate information on attendance as well as progress in program activities.

✔ **Make participation monitoring a program priority.**

A program's philosophy can affect the amount of time and resources devoted to monitoring participation. Contrasting some programs in the NEWWS Evaluation provides a clear example of the differences. In Atlanta, the program philosophy was to encourage the individual to take the initiative in asking for help if she was not attending or advancing in her activities. In addition, Atlanta case managers did not see it as their responsibility to contact service providers to get information on how participants were doing. The education providers confirmed that this was the case: although they maintained attendance information for their own records, there was no mechanism by which they regularly communicated this information to the welfare-to-work office.

In contrast, in the Grand Rapids and Riverside programs, close participation monitoring was a high priority, and the programs had more extensive procedures to promote close monitoring than in Atlanta. For example, case managers in Grand Rapids and Riverside conducted regular site visits to job clubs and education classes to make sure people showed up for their assigned activities and to check on their progress. In turn, service providers carefully documented attendance and submitted attendance reports to the welfare-to-work program staff on a weekly basis.

These two philosophies resulted in very different degrees of monitoring. Fewer staff in Atlanta reported that they received "a lot of information" on participants' progress from service providers. In addition, Atlanta staff reported that it took them about three weeks to learn about attendance problems from service providers — about twice as long as case managers in the other sites reported. It also took them longer to contact welfare recipients about their attendance problems.[9]

✔ **Use financial sanctions to enforce program requirements.**

Sanctioning should be viewed as a tool to bring welfare recipients into compliance with program requirements, not as an end in itself. As was noted in section 9, programs with high sanctioning rates do not necessarily achieve greater participation rates or impacts than those with moderate sanctioning rates. Sanctions are, however, important in reinforcing the mandatory nature of a welfare-to-work program. When sanctions are warranted, therefore, they should be enforced quickly. Programs generally have a variety of intermediate steps, such as an "intent to sanction notice" and a conciliation process. Staff should follow these steps while making clear why the steps have been taken. Welfare recipients who are sanctioned should understand why the sanction was imposed and what steps they need to take to "cure" the sanction.

9. Hamilton et al., 1997.

Recommendations from Program Experience

✔ **Communicate both expectations for participation and the consequences of not complying.**

Once people are participating in welfare-to-work activities, they need to understand exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect if they don't comply with program requirements. Field research suggests that welfare recipients often have a general idea of program requirements and penalties but may not fully understand the details.[10] If they do not understand exactly how many hours they are supposed to attend or how to report back information about job contacts, even those making a good-faith effort to comply may not meet participation requirements.

Many programs use written plans to map out the steps that participants will take (as well as the support that staff will provide). Making sure that a participant receives a *written* copy of her plan and any other materials explaining program rules and requirements reinforces the message. It is important, however, that the information regarding expectations and consequences be discussed *verbally* as well. Expectations should be reviewed regularly and updated at points where a plan is revised or a participant moves from one stage in the program to another.

✔ **Maintain frequent contact.**

The sooner program staff become aware of and address participation problems, the more likely they will be to avoid participation lapses or to bring individuals back into program activities promptly. Maintaining frequent and regular contact with participants can help staff learn of issues before they result in nonparticipation and can keep participation breaks to a minimum. Staff in some programs check in with everyone in their caseloads once a week. Others maintain such frequent contact at the beginning of new activities, but reduce their monitoring of the case after a few weeks of steady participation; if, however, participation problems arise, the case managers resume close monitoring until the problems are resolved.

When welfare-to-work activities are in the same locations as case management, staff find it is often easy and productive simply to stop in (often near the end of the day's activity) to check in with participants. They are thus able to monitor participation and to reinforce the mandatory message at the same time. When activities are located off-site, case managers often find it useful both to obtain attendance data from the service provider and to check in regularly with participants themselves.

✔ **Promote communication between various staff who work with participants.**

In a traditional case management model, processing sanctions requires com-

10. Brown, Bloom, and Butler, 1997.

munication between welfare-to-work program staff (who monitor participation) and income maintenance staff (who implement grant adjustments). Making sure this communication happens quickly and accurately is necessary to enforcing the participation mandate. In addition, eligibility staff keep track of recipients' changing statuses (such as moves to another county or state, starting or ending a job, or the birth of another child) to let program staff know when a recipient is no longer required, or once again required, to participate in a program.

Programs have tried a variety of techniques to improve communication, such as creating liaisons in each office and grouping workers from each office into teams that serve the same caseload. Some programs hold monthly joint staff meetings to share information and discuss coordination issues. Housing staff from the two units in the same building can also help build relationships and facilitate communication.

The lesson about communication also applies to programs where welfare-to-work activities are offered in-house and facilitated by various staff members. For example, one staff person may run job readiness workshops, another supervise a job search resource room, and another teach GED preparation classes. A welfare recipient may be involved in all these activities at some point. Case managers need to find out quickly whether the participants attended the activities as scheduled and made satisfactory progress. Many programs use sign-in sheets and attendance lists to collect information, and give case managers access to those lists. Others have the staff members who are supervising activities alert case managers only when recipients fail to participate as expected. Regular staff meetings can also be used as a forum for discussing individual cases.

✔ **Forge close linkages with service providers.**

When a program sends people to outside agencies to attend activities, linkages must be established between the program and the service providers in order for program staff to monitor participation. Program staff need to learn quickly about participation problems so that they can follow up with those who are not meeting the requirements.

Programs have fostered effective linkages in different ways. For example, staff at contracted agencies may fax daily or weekly attendance records to the welfare-to-work program. Other providers give the welfare department staff access to automated attendance data to allow close monitoring. A third option is to locate welfare-to-work program staff on-site at the provider or tie staff to particular providers. For example, one case manager may handle all cases assigned to a particular training provider. This approach can forge closer links between the two institutions and allow welfare staff to notice and respond to participation problems more quickly.[11] Finally, some programs make report-

11. In the NEWWS Evaluation, for example, Portland located welfare case managers at the providers (see Scrivener et al., 1998), and Grand Rapids tied staff to particular providers (see Hamilton et al., 1997).

ing a part of performance-based contracts with providers, giving the provider a financial incentive to monitor participation and report on it in a timely manner.[12]

16. Motivating Participants

Staff in welfare-to-work programs often struggle with how to motivate welfare recipients to participate. It is important to remember that staff cannot make someone *want* to do something they do *not want* to do. Everyone has personal desires and goals, however, and staff can help welfare recipients articulate what they want and show them how the welfare-to-work program can help them achieve their *own* goals. Staff who have used these techniques report that they are often able to engage even people who are at first reluctant to participate.

Recommendations from Program Experience

✔ **Make orientations engaging and inspiring.**

An orientation provides an opportunity to communicate what the program has to offer: to "market" the available activities and support services and explain the potential benefits of the program. Because most welfare-to-work programs deal with welfare recipients who must participate or face financial sanctions, the initial encounter is also an opportunity to convey the mandatory nature of the program's participation requirement. Communicating this "carrot and stick" combination increases the chance that recipients will participate in later program activities. It is then important to meet the expectations that you set, in terms of both what the program offers and what is required. People are more likely to stay involved in a program that delivers what it promises and meets their expectations.

Despite the importance of the orientation for setting the atmosphere of the program, orientations are too often lengthy meetings that overload welfare recipients with complicated information and paperwork. Instead, orientations should be carefully designed to be engaging and to convey clearly the main messages about both opportunities and consequences. In selecting staff to run orientations, programs should look for people who are outgoing and can generate excitement. Several programs have found that bringing in employers, job developers, and former participants who are now working helps to energize participants.

✔ **Help participants identify their skills and strengths.**

Many welfare recipients enter welfare-to-work programs with low levels of self-esteem. It may be difficult for them to believe that they can be successful in employment, and they may have a limited view of the kind of job they

12. For example, the Riverside site in the NEWWS Evaluation did this (see Hamilton et al., 1997).

might get. By helping people identify their strengths and skills (and then recognizing incremental accomplishments), welfare-to-work programs can build self-esteem, thus motivating people to continue participating. Many programs do this with exercises designed to get participants looking at all the kinds of things they can do, whether associated with a past job, volunteer work, raising a family, or their community.

In doing so, it is important for staff to convey that they believe in participants' ability to succeed. Staff in some programs have traditionally focused on participants' barriers to employment rather than on their strengths. As will be discussed in section 19, however, many people with barriers succeed in employment, and it makes more sense for staff to start out with the view that participants have skills and can succeed. Conveying this attitude to participants themselves can increase motivation.

✔ **Help participants identify realistic goals and maintain a focus on those goals.**

Some welfare recipients may lack motivation to move into the workforce because they do not have clear employment goals. Some programs take participants on tours of work sites, bring in workers from various fields to talk about their jobs, or use job shadowing and internships to give participants exposure to different fields and help them identify what kind of job they might want.

Other participants may have employment goals that are out of reach and may find it difficult to be motivated to seek an entry-level, low-wage job. Staff can help those people set more realistic short-term goals that are still in line with their longer-term aspirations. For example, a welfare recipient who wants to be a nurse might begin with a maintenance job in a hospital. Staff can then help that person map out a plan for gaining additional training to become a nurse. Even if the first job does not meet all her expectations, she can be motivated by future possibilities.

Finally, help participants identify goals that are not directly related to employment but that the welfare-to-work program can help them achieve, such as becoming a better role model for their children or feeling better about themselves.

✔ **Make activities fun and energizing.**

A common complaint of participants in education, training, and employment programs is that the activities are boring. Staff can use a variety of tools to keep activities engaging. Perhaps the most important element is the instructor. Programs should therefore hire carefully for key positions such as job club facilitator. Look for someone outgoing, with experience in public speaking and group facilitation. In some programs, staff take turns running an activity, then decide who is best at it and make that person a specialist in that activity.

Other factors can also increase the extent to which program activities are engaging. In general, it is best to design group activities rather than individual

ones and to encourage interaction among participants. Experienced instructors suggest that groups of about 20 participants are optimal for both personal attention and group interaction. Activities that get participants out of the classroom setting can also be energizing. Teaching participants practical skills and letting them make quick use of those skills makes activities more meaningful and increases motivation.

✔ **Measure progress in achievable steps, and celebrate success.**

It is important to help participants set incremental steps toward achieving their longer-term goals. Giving people the opportunity to make progress and achieve success along the way can go far in increasing self-esteem and motivation. Success, therefore, should not be defined only as achieving the end goal of employment. For some welfare recipients, going on a first job interview, completing an application, even attending regularly for a full week are meaningful accomplishments. Staff should recognize achievement at each step, while also looking ahead to the next step of the plan. Continually recognizing success and setting new challenges will maintain momentum and motivation.

Welfare-to-work programs have found many ways to recognize participants' achievement and celebrate success. Some staff send personal notes of congratulation to participants who complete milestones, along with encouragement for future challenges. Many programs use "walls of success" to publicly recognize accomplishments. Names and photos of participants are posted in a visible area, with dates and descriptions of their accomplishments. Visibly recognizing success can motivate not only those who are recognized but also other participants who see what their peers have achieved.

✔ **Share success stories.**

Perhaps the best way to motivate participants is to show them living proof that the program can really help. Sharing the stories of people who have gotten jobs as a result of participation, or who have achieved other goals, can motivate others to do the same. Success stories from their peers can also help participants who are focused on barriers to employment look beyond those barriers and develop self-confidence.

There are two ways that programs can share success stories. First, they can publicize the accomplishments of current participants. The "wall of success" just described is a very good way to do this. Their stories can also be included in a program newsletter and acknowledged at events for participants. Second, programs can involve former participants, inviting them to speak at orientations and job clubs and pairing them as mentors with current participants. An especially effective approach can be to incorporate former welfare recipients into the program's staff mix. Former recipients on staff are not only able to inspire and motivate participants but are also uniquely able to push those who feel they are unable to succeed.

✔ **Build relationships between participants and staff and among participants.**

By motivating participants and allowing them to support each other and learn from each other, group activities can increase participation and improve program outcomes. Programs can use group activities to create a team spirit among participants. Some programs also use a buddy system to build peer relationships. Recently, many programs have begun using mentors to support participants in the transition from welfare to work. Mentors can also help promote participation by monitoring progress and making sure that program staff are aware of any problems that might arise.

Many program staff feel that strong relationships with participants are important to success, and participants often say they succeeded because a particular staff member "really cared" about them. Staff can demonstrate in observable ways that they care about participants, such as by taking the extra step of sending a personal note or following up on a conversation. Remember, however, that while program experience and participant feedback suggest that these are good things to do, it is not clear that they directly impact participation rates. As was noted in section 1-i, the research has not found that a more personalized case management approach increases participation.

✔ **Give participants options.**

Within program guidelines, it can help to give welfare recipients choices about what they do. For example, many states allow participants who work part-time to engage in other activities for the additional required hours of participation. Others allow participants with low skills to choose between job placement and basic education. Programs that include community service employment may give participants a choice of placements. The ability to choose activities can help motivate participants by giving them control over their situation. Also, the more options participants have, the more likely they will be to find one that interests them.

Options are also important in broadening participants' ideas about what kind of job they can get. Some welfare recipients may enter programs with the belief that they can get only one kind of job, perhaps because of their limited work experience. Programs can educate participants about the range of jobs available — including the range of entry-level jobs — and help them decide which job may be right for their interests and skills.

17. Reducing Periods of Inactivity

Even when welfare recipients and staff do everything they are supposed to do, there may be frequent periods when individual recipients do not count as participating because they are in between allowable activities. This "down" time, whether before welfare-to-work activities begin or between the end of one

activity and the beginning of the next, can lower a program's participation rate. This section includes advice for reducing periods of inactivity and, as a result, increasing participation.

Lessons from the Research

✔ **Get welfare recipients assigned to activities quickly.**

The sooner people are assigned to activities, the sooner they can begin or resume participating. Following orientation, therefore, staff should assign participants to a program activity quickly. Some programs have streamlined this process by having participants meet with their case managers at the end of the orientation itself. Similarly, case managers should have systems in place for knowing when an activity is scheduled to end, so that a next step can be quickly assigned. To avoid delays and make tracking easier, some case managers schedule follow-up appointments at the end of each appointment. Another option is to have the staff who are facilitating one activity schedule participants for the next. For example, a training instructor might directly schedule welfare recipients to begin a job search activity as soon as they complete the training.

In general, the simpler the program model, the more readily people can be assigned to activities. More complex models, involving more assessing and screening and a larger array of possible activity assignments, can slow down the process of getting people into initial activities. They can also make it more difficult to follow up if people drop out of activities, and can cause delays in assigning them to subsequent activities.

✔ **Promote flexibility in the structure or scheduling of program activities.**

Across programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside, in a typical month, approximately 4 percent of those who were required to participate in program activities and who had already attended program orientations were inactive because, although they had been assigned to an activity, they were waiting for it to begin.[13]

Time lags between activities can be lessened by having "open entry/open exit" activities or classes. These are activities without a fixed start date or completion time. They enable welfare recipients to begin participating as soon as they are enrolled in the program and to "graduate" from the activity as soon as they are ready. This type of approach works best with activities in which much of the work is done independently, such as job search or a self-directed computer skills program. For other activities, in which open entry may be inappropriate, it helps to have classes begin frequently. For example, rather than scheduling job clubs to begin only once a month, have them start every week. That way, participants will not have to wait long to begin.

13. Hamilton, 1995.

A fall-back approach is to use job search as a filler activity whenever gaps are unavoidable. People waiting for an activity to begin might spend the time in an independent job search or might be assigned to supervised use of a job search resource room. They will then count as participating continuously (and they might find employment in the meantime).

✔ **Have clear deferral policies and closely monitor people who are temporarily deferred from participation.**

The extent to which a welfare-to-work program allows welfare recipients to delay participation will affect participation rates. For example, in the Riverside JOBS program, approximately one-fifth of those who attended an orientation were not given an activity assignment.[14] About one-quarter of these "deferrals" were already participating in education or training activities that did not meet the program's approval criteria. The remaining recipients were not assigned to an activity owing to a severe family crisis, illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction, emotional or mental problems, transportation issues, a first-trimester pregnancy, or a housing move.

In contrast, only a very small proportion of oriented recipients in the Atlanta and Grand Rapids JOBS programs were not given an activity assignment: 5 percent in Atlanta and 1 percent in Grand Rapids. Overall, in the Riverside program, 44 percent of all orientation attendees participated in some type of program activity during the two years following orientation. This same figure was 74 percent in Atlanta and 69 percent in Grand Rapids.

Although Riverside's deferral policies are not the only reason for the difference in the longitudinal participation rates between the three sites, the results do suggest that Riverside's practice deferred some people who, if assigned to a program activity, probably would have participated. In addition, many of those deferred in the Riverside program remained in this status for substantial periods of time.[15] In order to increase participation, it is important to monitor deferred recipients closely, so that they can be swiftly assigned to program activities once the situation that prompted the deferral ends. Some programs limit the length of deferrals, to ensure that the ability — or inability — of individuals to participate is regularly reassessed.

✔ **Arrange for quick reentry into the program when participants who are working leave employment.**

Employment while receiving welfare counts as participation for meeting the federal TANF rates. As has been documented in many studies, however, many employed welfare recipients are in low-wage, unstable jobs, and people leave these jobs at a high rate.[16] When individuals stop working, it often takes a

14. Hamilton et al., 1997.

15. Hamilton et al., 1997.

16. Blank, 1995; Burtless, 1995; Cancian and Meyer, 1998; Hershey and Pavetti, 1997; Quint and Musick, 1994; Rangarajan, Meckstroth, and Novak, 1998; Wagner et al., 1998.

while before the welfare system realizes they are no longer employed and refers them back to the welfare-to-work program. In the Riverside JOBS program, case managers took advantage of the state's 90-day employment follow-up rules to identify those who had left jobs and to get them quickly back into welfare-to-work program activities (most often, back into job search). These participants circumvented the usual program orientation process and went right into program activities.[17]

18. Meeting Support Service Needs

In order for welfare recipients to participate in welfare-to-work activities, they may need a number of support services. The most common of these are child care and transportation assistance. In addition, some people may need help taking care of medical or legal problems, finding stable housing, or dealing with personal issues.

When working with participants, welfare-to-work program staff should keep these needs in perspective. The job of a case manager is not to solve all of a person's problems but to assist her in participating in the program, getting a job, and remaining employed. That said, programs that want to promote participation need to help welfare recipients overcome barriers that might interfere with participation. This section offers advice for programs on how to meet support service needs, in the context of increasing participation.

Lessons from the Research

✔ **Allocate sufficient resources for child care assistance.**

Research evidence shows that child care assistance is crucial to program participation for many welfare recipients. In the NEWWS Evaluation, the Riverside site had a substantial shortage of child care slots. Case managers noted that some area providers did not like working with the program because they did not approve of the reimbursement rates or procedures. Case managers encouraged clients to use low-cost arrangements and this frequently became the subject of clashes between the case managers and clients.[18] A study of monthly participation found that child care was somewhat more problematic in Riverside than in the two other sites included in the analysis (Atlanta and Grand Rapids). In a typical month, 6 percent of nonparticipants in Riverside were not active because child care was unavailable or unacceptable to clients. In the other sites, child care problems were the barrier for only 1 or 2 percent of nonparticipants.[19]

17. Unpublished MDRC analysis from NEWWS Evaluation data.

18. Hamilton et al., 1997.

19. Hamilton, 1995.

The experience of the Florida Project Independence program also illustrates this point. Over the course of an evaluation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the program experienced child care cost overruns. Program administrators found that they had spent much of the child care resources for program participants. In order to ensure that adequate resources would be available to welfare recipients entitled to transitional care when they became employed, the program dramatically reduced the availability of child care for those participating in program activities. Before the child care restrictions went into effect, participation rates in the Florida program were similar for parents of younger children (3 to 5) and parents with older children (6 and older). After child care assistance was restricted, parents with younger children participated at a lower level than those without young children.[20]

✔ **Support the child care needs of parents with young children.**

A common perception is that parents with young children will not be able to participate in program activities as much as parents with older children. The Florida example just noted shows that these parents can participate so long as resources are available. In fact, in many programs studied, parents with younger children actually participated at slightly *higher* rates than those with older children. For example, Portland mandated participation in its welfare-to-work program by parents with children as young as age 1. Among parents whose youngest child was 1 or 2 at program entry, 69 percent participated within a two-year follow-up period; 63 percent of those whose youngest child was between 3 and 5 participated; and only 52 percent of those with no children below 6 participated. Portland did not have any notable child care problems and actually spent a great deal on child care, especially for those with younger children. This support likely allowed these parents to participate.[21]

Little information exists on the child care needs or participation patterns of parents of children younger than age 1, though under the PRWORA, states can require participation from this group. Prior to the implementation of the new law, Florida received a waiver from the federal government to allow it to require parents with children as young as 6 months old to participate. Preliminary analysis of program participation patterns indicates that the program was able to engage a substantial number of single parents with children between 6 and 18 months old in program activities.[22]

✔ **Provide sufficient transportation assistance.**

In surveys, many welfare recipients report that transportation is a barrier to participating in welfare-to-work program activities. The Family Support Act of

20. Kemple and Haimson, 1994.

21. Scrivener et al., 1998. Parents with younger children also were as likely as parents with older children to participate in the Oklahoma City and Grand Rapids NEWWS Evaluation sites (Storto et al., forthcoming, 1999; unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.)

22. Bloom et al., 1997.

1988 (FSA) required states to provide transportation assistance to people who were participating. Most of this assistance was in the form of bus tickets or reimbursement for bus tickets.

Most programs studied prior to the 1996 welfare law provided ample transportation assistance. In an analysis of monthly participation rates in three sites in the NEWWS Evaluation, transportation was a barrier to participation for only 1 percent of nonparticipants in one site (Grand Rapids), 7 percent in another site (Riverside), and none in the third site (Atlanta).[23]

Transportation may be a more substantial barrier in current programs. Unlike the FSA, the PRWORA does *not* require states and localities to provide transportation assistance. Also, the FSA exempted people who lived in a remote area that made program activities inaccessible, whereas the new law does not. Many programs that have expanded the reach of welfare-to-work activities have encountered transportation issues related to reverse commute and other differences between the places where welfare recipients live and where jobs are located.

Recommendations from Program Experience

✔ **Make support services available to those who need them, and make sure that they can be put into place quickly.**

Welfare recipients may face a variety of issues that make it difficult to participate, from child care and transportation needs to medical, legal, and housing problems. As has been noted earlier in this section, most programs provide subsidies for child care and offer bus passes, mileage reimbursement, help with car repairs, or other forms of assistance with transportation. Most also offer referral to service providers who can help with other needs. Staff can promote participation by helping welfare recipients identify and address these barriers to participation.

The more quickly potential participants can arrange child care and other support services, the more quickly they can begin participating in a welfare-to-work program. Case managers can begin by asking people what is preventing them from starting participation immediately and helping them anticipate their needs, such as child care, and conflicting priorities, such as doctor's appointments. Once the needs are identified, staff can help people by providing information about the options available to them and then linking them with services. Staff in several programs have compiled lists of local service providers, including hours of operation, contact information, and enrollment criteria. Some programs coordinate with local resource and referral agencies to facilitate child care, mental health, and other services.

Staff should help participants think through the advantages and limitations of available options, in order to choose those that best meet their needs.

23 Hamilton, 1995.

Once appropriate services have been identified, welfare-to-work program staff can foster participation by facilitating any referrals, enrollment information, or payment that is needed.

✔ **Minimize logistical problems.**

Staff can help minimize many of the logistical problems that participants face by taking child care, transportation, and other needs into account when planning program activities and services and eventual employment. For example, for participants who do not have a car, look for providers (and employers) located on bus routes. Look for child care providers located near activities or target service providers with child care on site. If several participants need to travel to the same site, organize a carpool or provide van service. Co-location of services, such as in a one-stop center, can also minimize transportation difficulties and reduce participation problems.

✔ **Help participants identify reliable arrangements and backup plans.**

Even when child care is arranged and subsidized, participation problems often arise because those arrangements may be unreliable. Informal care is especially likely to break down occasionally. Even when parents use a formal child care center, however, having a sick child who is unable to attend the center may make it impossible for a parent to attend welfare-to-work activities. Staff can help prevent these problems by working with parents to identify backup arrangements, such as a relative or a drop-in center, to which they can turn should their principal arrangements fail.

The same is true of transportation arrangements. Those welfare recipients who have cars often have ones in poor condition that are liable to break down unexpectedly. Others must rely on lifts, carpools, or public transportation. Transportation problems can cause participants to miss activities or even lose a job. As with child care, case managers should help participants identify backup alternatives that they can use if their regular transportation falls through.

✔ **Provide ongoing support as needs change.**

Most programs help new participants arrange for child care, transportation, and other needs. Programs should also provide ongoing support to work through any problems that arise. To ease case managers' workloads, some programs designate a specialized staff person as a contact for ongoing child care information and assistance. In addition, as people move through the program — from one activity to another or into employment — their support service needs may change. For example, they may need child care at different hours or transportation to a different location. Programs can avoid disruptions in participation by helping parents anticipate these changes and revise their arrangements.

✔ **Be creative.**

Each community operating a welfare-to-work program is likely to find that it faces particular support service needs. For example, the needs of rural communities are different from those of urban areas. Communities also have very different mixes of available resources to help people meet support service needs. Some may have few child care providers, others poor bus service, and still others a lack of substance abuse treatment slots. Welfare-to-work programs need to assess their individual situations and think creatively about how to meet local needs. For example, some programs have used church vans during off-hours to transport participants to activities or to jobs. In developing solutions, many programs have found it useful to develop partnerships with other agencies, such as mental health, and with area employers. Involving the business community can help programs address support service needs while maintaining a focus on the employment goal.

V.

Reaching Deeper into the Caseload: Strategies for Eliciting Participation from the "Hard to Serve"

As states succeed in moving portions of their caseload into the labor market, the people who remain on welfare are likely to be those with the most barriers to work, sometimes called the "hard to serve." Some will have been previously exempt from participation in welfare-to-work programs, and others will have participated only briefly in the past or had difficulty making the transition from program activities to jobs. These people are more likely to have a limited work or education history or to have personal or family issues that make achieving economic self-sufficiency difficult. Many will need additional support and services in order to participate in program activities and to find and keep jobs.

This part of the guide focuses on the challenge of involving hard-to-serve individuals in welfare-to-work activities. Sections 20 and 21 describe program models and strategies to elicit participation from individuals commonly considered hard to serve. First, however, section 19 provides more detail on the hard to serve and how they can be identified.

19. Who Are the Hard to Serve, and How Can They Be Identified?

Various factors *may* hinder welfare recipients' transition into the labor market, including limited work experience, low basic skills, physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, child health or behavioral problems, family violence and other serious family problems, and housing instability.[1] People with these barriers are less likely, on average, to participate in welfare-to-work programs and to succeed in the labor market. Some programs use an initial screening to try to identify these issues and target individuals for special services. As this section will show, however, beginning with such a screening may not be the best way to identify the hard to serve or target program resources.

▶ **It is difficult to determine who will succeed in traditional welfare-to-work programs and who will need additional support.**

While people with certain characteristics are more likely, on average, to have difficulty moving to employment, the presence of barriers does not necessarily determine outcomes for a specific individual. Many welfare recipients with the characteristics just described succeed in employment without additional support. In other words, not everyone who has barriers is hard to serve.

Data from the NEWWS Evaluation illustrate this point in terms of participation in employment and training activities. In the Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside labor force attachment programs, people about to enter the program completed a questionnaire that asked about some potential barriers to participating in activities. Although people who subsequently did not participate in any activities were more likely to have potential barriers than those who did

1 Pavetti et al., 1996.

participate, the differences were not large, and a substantial number of participants also had potential barriers. For example, as the first row of Table 3 shows, 17 percent of people who participated in an employment or training activity (over a two-year period) had reported that they could not participate because they had a health or emotional problem; 24 percent of those who never participated initially reported this barrier.[2]

In other words, many people who initially reported a potential barrier did, in fact, participate. Any prediction or screening based on the characteristics examined would have inappropriately identified some recipients as needing special services when they could have proceeded successfully without any intervention and might have allowed other eventual nonparticipants to slip through unidentified. This finding suggests that individual characteristics cannot be used to predict who will and who will not participate in a welfare-to-work program.

Table 3

Self-Reported Barriers and Participation in Program Activities

Potential Barrier	Participants	Nonparticipants
Health or emotional problems — self	17%	24%
Health or emotional problems — child or other family member	15%	20%
Too many family problems	25%	34%

SOURCE: Unpublished MDRC analyses of NEWWS Evaluation data.

Similarly, analyses of labor market participation have shown that many people with potential barriers to economic self-sufficiency *do* actually work; the presence of barriers is thus a weak predictor of eventual labor market success.[3] For example, in the NEWWS Evaluation, while people who did not work at all during a three-year follow-up period were more likely to have potential barriers to work than people who did work during the follow-up period, many of those who did work also had barriers. In Portland, for example, 40 percent of those who did not work had limited prior work experience (they had never worked full-time for one employer for at least six months); 30 percent of those who did work in the three-year follow-up period also had this barrier to work. The largest differences between the workers and nonworkers were on self-reported barriers such as health or emotional problems and family problems. Many of

2 Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data. Differences between the percentages of participants and nonparticipants reporting each barrier shown are statistically significant at 1 percent — that is, there is less than a 1 percent probability that the observed difference occurred by chance.

3 See Olson and Pavetti, 1996.

those who worked, however, had potential barriers to work, such as low reading or math test scores, a limited work history, and substantial prior AFDC receipt.[4]

- **Using a program screen is a more reliable way to identify the hard to serve.**

These findings demonstrate that the "hard to serve" label does not describe a group that can be reliably or efficiently identified through objective characteristics. From a programmatic point of view, therefore, it is more useful to define the hard to serve *operationally* as those recipients who are difficult to engage effectively in program activities and/or have difficulty moving toward and into the labor market. This formulation suggests allowing all recipients to go through a "program screen" to determine who needs alternative activities or additional support.

One way to conduct such a screening is to define as hard to serve the people who are left in the program after attending some initial activities and to target those individuals for specialized services. Many "work first" programs use an initial job search in this way. Instead of beginning with an intensive assessment, they might require all welfare recipients to participate in a job search activity. Those who have not found jobs by the end of the activity are then assessed in more detail and assigned to another activity, such as counseling or short-term training. Alternatively, a certain length of time on assistance could trigger a more in-depth assessment and specialized services. Either way, additional services are reserved for those who demonstrate, by their lack of success in traditional activities, that they need further assistance.

20. Strategies for Increasing Participation Among the Hard to Serve

The issues or barriers that make a person hard to serve do not necessarily make participation or employment impossible. Indeed, many of these people will be able to participate without special intervention. Others may need extra support. Rather than exempting them or delaying their participation, programs can address many barriers while simultaneously involving people in other program activities.

The following are various strategies that programs use to increase the extent to which hard-to-serve recipients are able to participate.[5] Most of these approaches have not been formally evaluated, so their effectiveness, either in getting people to participate or in moving them to employment and off welfare, has not been determined.

4 Unpublished MDRC analysis of NEWWS Evaluation data.

5 For more detailed descriptions of some current programs designed to assist the hard to serve, see Pavetti et al., 1996.

Recommendations from Program Experience

✔ **Refer individuals with special needs to agencies that specialize in those areas.**

Welfare-to-work programs do not need to become experts in all areas. Instead, many programs build relationships with other local agencies (such as mental health services) and refer individual recipients for additional assistance. Some programs allow case managers to require people to attend counseling, substance abuse treatment, or other social services as a condition of receiving welfare benefits.

✔ **Provide training for program staff.**

Some programs have responded to recurring issues by training case managers in how to work with people facing certain barriers. For example, staff might be trained in how to identify signs of possible domestic violence, how to broach this sensitive topic with possible victims, and how to connect them with appropriate services.

✔ **Hire specially trained staff.**

Another approach is to hire specialized case managers to work with people once specific barriers have been identified. The case managers usually have specialized training and experience in such areas as counseling, substance abuse, or domestic violence. Typically, these case managers carry lower caseloads than average (from 20 to 50 cases), and they meet with participants more frequently and over longer periods of time.

✔ **Develop a trusting relationship with participants.**

The first step in addressing barriers to participation and employment is often recognizing that the barrier exists. People may be reluctant to disclose certain issues, such as domestic violence or substance abuse. When issues are sensitive, discussing them and developing plans to address them can also be difficult. Building relationships of trust between staff and welfare recipients is critical to all these steps.

✔ **Help participants support each other.**

Participants can be useful sources of support for each other. For example, some programs facilitate support groups, where participants facing common issues can share experiences and offer support and advice. Several programs involve former participants as mentors for those new to the program or to employment.

✔ **Extend supports after placement.**

The same issues that make participation difficult can also threaten job retention. Some programs offer support services both while individuals are in program activities and after they have found jobs. Extended transitional support may be a key to enabling some people to *remain* employed.

✔ **Don't try to solve everything.**

In working with participants with multiple barriers, it is easy to get caught up in trying to solve all the problems they face. Instead, focus on short-term strategies to address specific issues that are preventing the person from participating and moving to work.

The Timing of Support Services

The strategies just described can help staff identify and address barriers within the context of program participation. Some services and activities can take place simultaneously. For example, a person might participate in training while also involved in counseling. On the other hand, full-time activities or unsubsidized job placement may be inappropriate for people who have not yet addressed serious barriers.

In general, those with less severe barriers can succeed in traditional activities with additional support. Some recipients, however, may have barriers so severe that they cannot participate until they receive additional support. Programs should build in a certain amount of flexibility in this area so that participation can be deferred when necessary. Some programs set clear guidelines for who may be deferred from immediate participation, while others give case managers discretion in determining the best path for each individual.

One way to accommodate people with intensive support service needs is to expand the definition of program participation. For example, Utah allows people to attend activities such as mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, or similar activities to meet their participation requirement.[6] This approach can engage some people in the program who might otherwise not be participating, although participation in these activities would not count toward the rates calculated for TANF.

Overall, involving the vast majority of recipients quickly in employment-focused activities, while at the same time working to reduce any barriers that are present, will allow the maximum number to count as participating.

21. Program Approaches to Elicit Participation from the Hard to Serve

As the previous section described, many hard-to-serve recipients will be able to participate. This section briefly describes three program models that have been shown to engage the hard to serve, as well as other approaches being tried by current programs. Rather than exempting these welfare recipients, these programs attempt to create an employment-focused environment in which the individual can succeed.

6 Pavetti et al., 1995.

Programs That Have Successfully Involved Especially Disadvantaged Participants

Studies of programs in the late 1970s and the 1980s show that some were successful in engaging the more disadvantaged subgroups of states' welfare caseloads in program activities. While the programs served narrower portions of the welfare caseload than are being served under TANF, they succeeded with portions of their caseloads that most other programs did not. These programs may provide clues to ways that current welfare-to-work initiatives can engage hard-to-serve individuals.

▶ Supported Work

In the late 1970s, a program called Supported Work, which was operated in numerous sites across the country, succeeded in engaging long-term AFDC recipients in work experience and subsequently in the labor market. Targeted at various groups of hard-to-employ people, the program provided participants with about a year of paid work experience. Participants worked under the close supervision of staff, who made gradually increasing demands of them and provided job development and job search assistance. One of the target groups was long-term AFDC recipients (with an average receipt of about 8.5 years) who were unemployed and who had little or no prior labor market experience.[7] The program successfully engaged a large portion of these long-term AFDC recipients in work experience, increased employment and earnings, and decreased AFDC payments.[8]

▶ The Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM)

A welfare-to-work program run in California from 1985 to 1987 also yielded positive effects on participation, employment, earnings, and welfare receipt for several more disadvantaged groups. SWIM consisted of a fixed sequence of activities, beginning with a two-week job search workshop. Those without jobs at the end of the workshop then moved on to three months of work experience, with biweekly job club sessions. Those still unemployed would then be assessed and could be referred to community education and training activities.[9] SWIM increased participation in welfare-to-work activities for all subgroups analyzed and increased participation the most for the most disadvantaged subgroup: recipients with at least two years' prior assistance receipt, with no earnings in the year prior to program entry, and with no GED or high school diploma. Over a five-year follow-up period, earnings were increased and AFDC payments were decreased for this group, although not as much as for some less

7. The other targeted groups were "ex-addicts," people recently incarcerated, and youths with little or no employment history.

8. See Board of Directors, MDRC, 1980, for details on the program and its results. See also Hollister et al., 1984.

9. Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989.

disadvantaged subgroups. At the time, the findings were considered evidence that supported working with a broader spectrum of AFDC recipients than was common. In addition, the findings support the idea of continuously working with more disadvantaged individuals.[10]

- **California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program**

The GAIN program run in Riverside County in the late 1980s also succeeded in increasing participation levels and earnings and decreasing AFDC receipt for two disadvantaged subgroups of AFDC recipients. People with long-term prior welfare receipt (more than two years) and people "in need of basic education" (which includes those without a high school diploma or GED, those with a low score on either a math or a reading skills test, and those not proficient in English) participated at roughly the same rates as other people in the program (and significantly higher than a control group). Earnings and AFDC impacts for the disadvantaged subgroups were similar to impacts for the rest of the sample.

Researchers attributed the success of the Riverside GAIN program to its particular combination of program practices, including a pervasive employment message, job development efforts, use of work-focused education and training when appropriate, and a strong commitment to, adequate resources for, and willingness to enforce a mandatory participation requirement.[11]

Current Program Models Targeting the Hard to Serve

Welfare-to-work programs are testing several approaches to working with recipients who are hard to serve or hard to employ. In designing alternative activities for this group, programs should, to the extent possible, involve participants in activities that build job readiness at the same time they address a barrier. A good approach is to think about how you can replicate a work environment while creating a context in which the person can work. Many of the following activities do this.

- **Part-time employment.** Many programs deal with people who may not be able to sustain full-time jobs or who have low skills by allowing them to combine part-time work with other activities, such as basic education or counseling.
- **Work experience.** For welfare recipients who may not be able to find a job because they lack skills or work history, paid or unpaid community service jobs in public or private settings offer an opportunity to gain work experience and improve their basic work skills.
- **Work combined with support.** Some programs offer various permutations on work experience activities (in both public and private sector

10. For details on the program and its results, see Friedlander and Hamilton, 1993; and Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989.

11. For details, see Riccio and Friedlander, 1992; and Friedlander, Riccio, and Freedman, 1993.

job sites) coupled with additional support. For example, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and six cities in California have contracted with area Goodwill branches to provide both work experience and various support services, including counseling, parenting classes, and job search classes.[12]

- **Outsourcing.** Some programs have partnered with employers to contract out a piece of their business operations, such as packaging. The work is then done by participants who are supervised by program staff. This format creates a setting in which participants can work with increased support and reduced pressure.
- **Volunteer work.** Volunteering may be an appropriate transitional activity for recipients who are not able to handle the demands of a paid job. While volunteer activities (unless structured as community service) will not count toward the federal participation rates, they can be a viable option for people who are exempt from TANF participation requirements but still involved in welfare-to-work activities.
- **Job coaches.** Some programs hire job coaches, who accompany employees to work sites, working one-on-one or with teams. They can help new employees learn job skills and adjust to the work environment and can provide personal and moral support.
- **Specialized education services.** Low literacy and math skills exclude some people from some jobs and some training programs. Many programs offer education classes at pre-GED levels, and many couple basic education with vocational training or work. To the extent possible, education activities should focus directly on skills that will be used in the workplace. Remember, also, that participation in basic education generally does not count toward the TANF participation requirement.

Making the Transition Out of Alternative Activities

All these activities should be considered transitional to either regular program participation or employment. Making the activities short-term, combining them with job search, or periodically reevaluating job readiness can all accomplish this goal. For example, in the Goodwill program cited earlier, participants typically work in the site for three to five months, after which they are placed in jobs outside of Goodwill. Goodwill then provides postemployment counseling services for an additional six months as well as skills training classes for those who remain employed at the end of six months.

12. Petrie and Butler, 1997.

Appendix

Work- and Participation-Related Provisions of the 1996 Federal Welfare Law[1]

This appendix summarizes the work- and participation-related provisions of the Personal Responsibil..y and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Changes made to the PRWORA by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA), as well as regulations set forth in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Final Rule, are included here and noted as such. While this summary is not comprehensive, it can help policymakers and administrators understand how their program models will fit into the context of the federal legislation.

Participation Provisions

Participation rates. To avoid reductions in their block grants, states must meet the following minimum rates of participation for those receiving TANF assistance:

	Participation Rate (%)	
Year	All Families	Two-Parent Families
1997	25	75
1998	30	75
1999	35	90
2000	40	90
2001	45	90
2002+	50	90

1. This appendix is modified from Appendix A in Brown, 1997, with some additional information from Greenberg and Savner, 1996, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, and TANF Final Rule in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 64, No. 69, April 12, 1999, pp. 17719-17931.

Reduction of the participation rates. The rates are reduced by the number of percentage points by which average monthly caseloads of the last fiscal year are below FY 1995 caseloads. Caseload reductions due to changes in federal law or in eligibility criteria do not count toward reducing the participation rate.

Calculation of the participation rates. The rate for a fiscal year equals the average of the 12 monthly participation rates. The *numerator* equals the number of families receiving federally funded TANF assistance that include an adult or minor head of household who is engaged in "work" (that is, who meets the weekly hours requirement in allowable activities, defined below). The *denominator* equals the total number of families receiving assistance that include an adult or minor head of household, minus those in sanction status (but not those sanctioned more than 3 months of the past 12 months).

Definition of assistance. Only families receiving TANF "assistance" are included in the participation calculation. "Assistance" (Final Rule) includes cash payments, vouchers, and other benefits designed to meet a family's ongoing basic needs, as well as supportive services provided to families that are not employed. It does not include other benefits, such as non-recurrent, short-term benefits, work subsidies, counseling, and supportive services provided to families that are employed.

States can exempt single parents with a child under age 1 from participation; these parents may be disregarded from the calculation of participation rates for up to 12 months. A family that includes a disabled parent will not count in calculating the two-parent rate (BBA change). In calculating both the all-families and two-parent rate, states can choose whether or not to include families receiving assistance under a tribal work program (BBA change) or a tribal family assistance plan.

Other provisions. States can waive program requirements for individuals with a history of domestic violence. If a state fails to meet the required participation rates, the calculations will be adjusted to exclude those cases before a penalty is applied.

Hourly thresholds. To count toward the monthly participation rates, parents must participate for at least the following average number of hours per week during the month:

	Number of Hours of Participation Per Week		
Year	All Families	Single Parents with a Child Under Six*	Two-Parent Families
1997	20	20	35
1998	20	20	35
1999	25	20	35
2000+	30	20	35

*Or a non-parent relative if they are the only caretaker relative in the family (BBA change).

Note that the required hours for single-parent recipients with a child younger than six years old remains 20 hours per week through the period covered in the legislation. This provision became relevant in FY 1999, when the all-families rate exceeded 20 hours.

For two-parent families, the required hours may be met by a combination of effort between the two parents (BBA change). In addition, if a two-parent family is receiving federally funded child care assistance, then the two parents together must meet a 55-hour requirement (BBA change).

A family receiving assistance for only part of a month will count as participating if it meets the requirements in each full week in which it receives assistance (Final Rule).

Allowable activities. In order to count as participating for a month in any year, at least 20 hours per week for all families and 30 hours per week for two-parent families (50 hours for those with a 55-hour requirement) must be spent in one or more of the following activities:

- unsubsidized employment
- subsidized private-sector employment
- subsidized public-sector employment
- work experience
- on-the-job training
- job search and job readiness assistance (for up to six weeks total per individual — or 12 weeks if the state meets the definition of a "needy state" because of high unemployment or increased participation in the Food Stamp program [BBA change] — and not for more than four consecutive weeks)
- community service programs
- vocational educational training (up to 12 months per person; see the end of this section for the limitation on the percentage of the caseload allowed in this activity)
- provision of child care services to a person participating in community service

The remaining required hours may be in the above or the following activities:

- job skills training directly related to employment
- education directly related to employment (only for those who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent)
- satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence (only for those who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent)

Teen heads of household can count toward the participation rate by maintaining satisfactory attendance in high school or the equivalent (regardless of the number of hours) or by participating in education directly related to employment for at least 20 (BBA change) hours per week.

In FY 1997–1999, no more than 30 percent of persons in all families can count toward the rate by participating in vocational educational training. In FY 2000 and thereafter, no more than 30 percent of those counted can meet the requirements by *either* participating in vocational educational training or being a teen head of household in school (BBA change).

Penalties for individuals. If parents refuse to participate (except for good cause and other exceptions determined by the state), the state is required to reduce assistance at least by an amount pro rated to the period of noncompliance or to terminate assistance.

States cannot reduce or terminate assistance for refusal to work if a single parent with a child under age six can prove an inability (as determined by the state) to obtain needed child care, for one or more of the following reasons: unavailability of appropriate child care within a reasonable distance from the parent's home or work site; unavailability or unsuitability of informal child care by a relative or under other arrangements; unavailability of appropriate and affordable formal child care arrangements.

Penalties for states. A state's block grant will be reduced by 5 percent for not achieving the participation rates, plus an additional 2 percent each immediately successive year in which the rates are not met (BBA change), up to a maximum of 21 percent. (The exact amount is to be determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on the basis of the severity of the failure to achieve the rates.) If a state's grant is cut because of a penalty, it must replace the reduced funds with state funds in the next fiscal year.

Other Work Provisions

Following are some additional work-related provisions in the legislation:

Assessment and individual responsibility plan. States must make an initial assessment of the skills, prior work experience, and employability of recipients who are 18 or older or who do not have a high school diploma or the equivalent and are not attending high school. On the basis of that assessment, states have the option of developing a plan that sets forth an employment goal, obligations, and services that are designed to move the recipient into private-sector employment as quickly as possible.

Community service required after two months. States must require parents who have received assistance for two months, who are not meeting the participation requirements, and who are not exempt from those requirements to participate in community service employment. The minimum number of hours

per week and the community service tasks are determined by the state. States can opt out of this requirement.

Work required after two years. Parents must engage in work (as defined by the state) once they have received assistance for 24 months or once the state determines that they are ready to engage in work, whichever is earlier.

Other Related Provisions

Time limit. States cannot use federal block grant funds for families that include an adult who has received assistance (attributable to federal funds and based on the definition of "assistance" described earlier) for 60 months, whether consecutive or not. States can exempt up to 20 percent of the caseload from the time limit. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services can reduce a state's block grant by 5 percent if the state does not comply with the time limit provisions during a fiscal year.

Teen parents. States cannot use federal block grant funds to assist an unmarried parent under 18 who has a child at least 12 weeks old and who has not completed high school (or its equivalent) unless the parent is in school, in a GED program, or in an alternative education or training program approved by the state. Block grant funds also cannot be used to provide assistance to an unmarried parent under 18 who is not living at home or in another adult-supervised setting, unless the state determines that such an arrangement is not appropriate.

Child care. Child care funding is consolidated into a block grant to states. At least 70 percent of mandatory funds must be used for families who are receiving assistance under the state's welfare block grant program, are in transition off assistance through work activities, or are at risk of becoming dependent on assistance. A "substantial portion" of any additional amount should be used to provide assistance to low-income working families.

Maintenance of effort. States are required to continue spending at least 80 percent of what they spent on similar programs in FY 1994. However, states meeting the federal participation rates are required to maintain only 75 percent of past spending.

Continuation of waivers. States can opt to continue one or more waivers that were in effect as of the date of enactment (August 22, 1996). Until the waiver expires, the legislation does not apply to the extent that it is inconsistent with the waiver. As relates to participation requirements, calculation of a state's participation rates will be based on the waiver's policies regarding work activities, hours, exemption, and sanctions. States that choose to continue a waiver will still receive the same amount of block grant funding.

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Jobs First: Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes, Claudia Nicholson.

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An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

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Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

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The Struggle for Self-Sufficiency: Participants in the Self-Sufficiency Project Talk About Work, Welfare, and Their Futures (SRDC). 1995. Wendy Bancroft, Sheila Currie Vernon.

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A large-scale study (formerly known as the JOBS Evaluation) of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Adult Education for People on AFDC: A Synthesis of Research (U.S. Department of Education [ED]/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). 1995. Edward Pauly.

Early Findings on Program Impacts in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1995. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander.

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Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Evaluating Two Welfare-to-Work Program Approaches: Two-Year Findings on the Labor Force Attachment and Human Capital Development Programs in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1997. Gayle Hamilton, Thomas Brock, Mary Farrell, Daniel Friedlander, Kristen Harknett.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of the Portland (Oregon) Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 1998. Susan Scrivener, Gayle Hamilton, Mary Farrell, Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Christine Schwartz.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Preliminary Findings on Participation Patterns and First-Year Impacts. 1998. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Low-Income Parents and the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. 1998. Earl Johnson, Fred Doolittle.

Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Suzanne Lynn.

Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Sharon Rowser.

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Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1995. James A. Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James J. Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James A. Riccio.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

A Research Framework for Evaluating Jobs-Plus, a Saturation and Place-Based Employment Initiative for Public Housing Residents. 1998. James Riccio.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Section 3 Public Housing Study

An examination of the effectiveness of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act in affording employment opportunities for public housing residents.

Lessons from the Field on the Implementation of Section 3 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). 1996. Maxine Bailey, Suzanne Lynn.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Tulsa's IndEx Program: A Business-Led Initiative for Welfare Reform and Economic Development. 1997. Maria Buck.

Washington Works: Sustaining a Vision of Welfare Reform Based on Personal Change, Work Preparation, and Employer Involvement. 1998. Susan Goodden.

Cost Analysis Step by Step: A How-to Guide for Planners and Providers of Welfare-to-Work and Other Employment and Training Programs. 1998. David Greenberg, Ute Appenzeller.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Implementing the Earnings Supplement Project: A Test of a Re-employment Incentive (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). 1997. Howard Bloom, Barbara Fink, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Wendy Bancroft, Doug Tattrie.

Testing a Re-employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

Education Reform

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel A. Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this 10-site study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James J. Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James J. Kemple.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

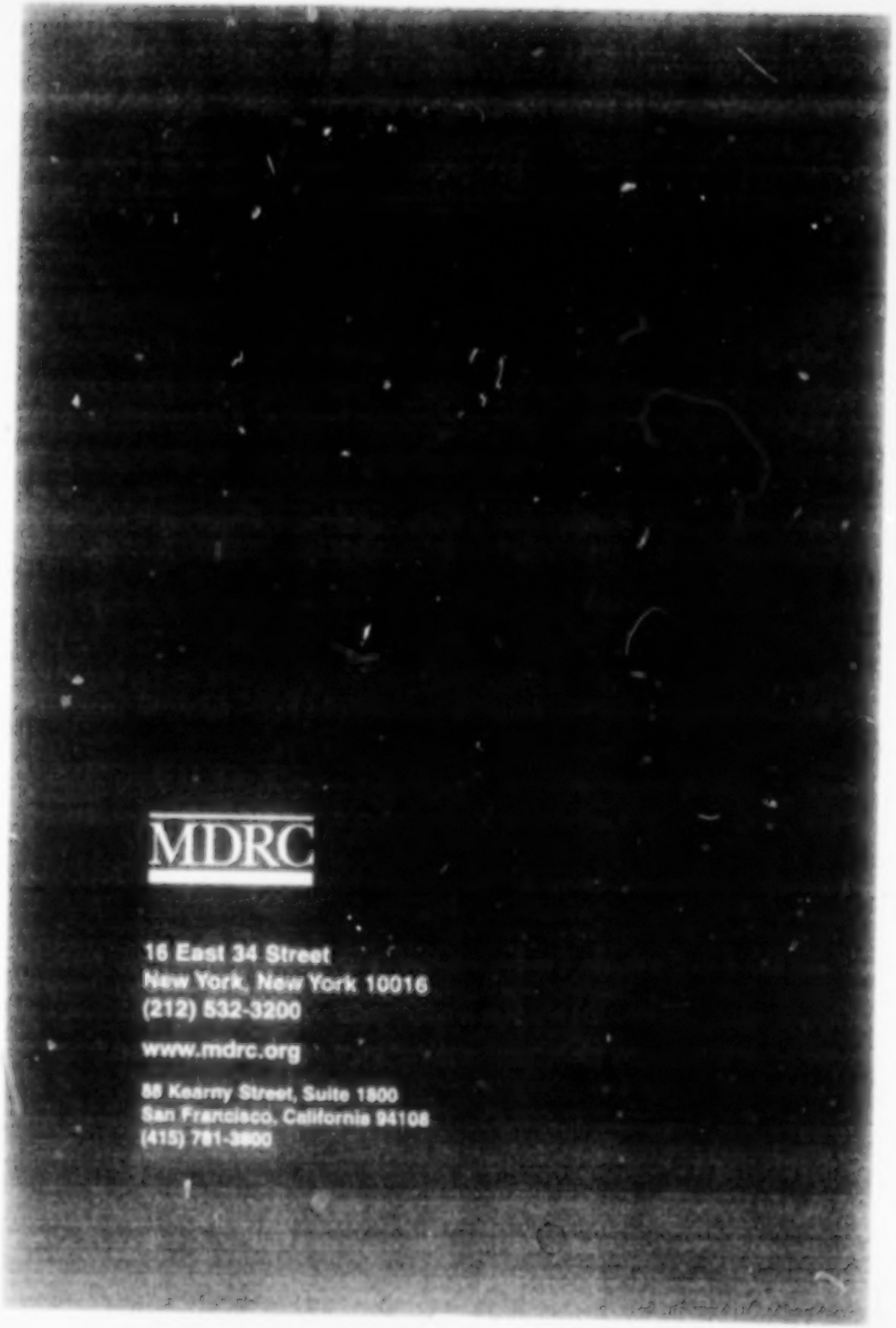
About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and San Francisco.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods such as large-scale studies to determine a program's effects, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.



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